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**CHECO**  
**SOUTHEAST ASIA**  
**REPORT**  
**THE VNAF AIR DIVISIONS**  
**REPORTS ON IMPROVEMENT**  
**AND MODERNIZATION**

**CONTINUING REPORT**

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**C**ontemporary

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**E**xamination of

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**O**perations

**REPORT**

# **THE VNAF AIR DIVISIONS REPORTS ON IMPROVEMENT AND MODERNIZATION**

**23 NOVEMBER 1971**

**HQ PACAF**

**Directorate of Operations Analysis  
CHECO/CORONA HARVEST DIVISION**

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**Project CHECO 7th AF, DOAC**

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**DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE**  
**HEADQUARTERS PACIFIC AIR FORCES**  
**APO SAN FRANCISCO 96553**




**PROJECT CHECO REPORTS**

The counterinsurgency and unconventional warfare environment of Southeast Asia has resulted in the employment of USAF airpower to meet a multitude of requirements. The varied applications of airpower have involved the full spectrum of USAF aerospace vehicles, support equipment, and manpower. As a result, there has been an accumulation of operational data and experiences that, as a priority, must be collected, documented, and analyzed as to current and future impact upon USAF policies, concepts, and doctrine.

Fortunately, the value of collecting and documenting our SEA experiences was recognized at an early date. In 1962, Hq USAF directed CINCPACAF to establish an activity that would be primarily responsive to Air Staff requirements and direction, and would provide timely and analytical studies of USAF combat operations in SEA.

Project CHECO, an acronym for Contemporary Historical Examination of Current Operations, was established to meet this Air Staff requirement. Managed by Hq PACAF, with elements at Hq 7AF and 7AF/13AF, Project CHECO provides a scholarly, "on-going" historical examination, documentation, and reporting on USAF policies, concepts, and doctrine in PACOM. This CHECO report is part of the overall documentation and examination which is being accomplished. It is an authentic source for an assessment of the effectiveness of USAF airpower in PACOM when used in proper context. The reader must view the study in relation to the events and circumstances at the time of its preparation--recognizing that it was prepared on a contemporary basis which restricted perspective and that the author's research was limited to records available within his local headquarters area.

  
ERNEST C. HARVIN, JR., Major General, USAF  
Chief of Staff

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FOR THE COMMANDER IN CHIEF

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Mike DeLeon", is written over the typed name.

MIKE DELEON, Colonel, USAF  
Chief, CHECO/CORONA HARVEST Division  
Directorate of Operations Analysis  
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  - (8) AFXOOSN. . . . . 1
  - (9) AFXOOSO. . . . . 1
  - (10) AFXOOSS. . . . . 1
  - (11) AFXOOSV. . . . . 1
  - (12) AFXOOTR. . . . . 1
  - (13) AFXOOTW. . . . . 1
  - (14) AFXOOTZ. . . . . 1
  - (15) AF/XOX . . . . . 6
  - (16) AFXOXXG. . . . . 1

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## 3. MAJOR COMMAND

### a. TAC

#### (1) HEADQUARTERS

(a) DO. . . . . 1  
(b) XP. . . . . 1  
(c) DOCC. . . . . 1  
(d) DREA. . . . . 1  
(e) IN. . . . . 1

#### (2) AIR FORCES

(a) 12AF  
1. DOO. . . . . 1  
2. IN. . . . . 1  
(b) T9AF(IN). . . . . 1  
(c) USAFSOF(DO) . . . . . 1

#### (3) WINGS

(a) 1SOW(DOI) . . . . . 1  
(b) 23TFW(DOI) . . . . . 1  
(c) 27TRW(DOI) . . . . . 1  
(d) 33TFW(DOI) . . . . . 1  
(e) 64TAW(DOI) . . . . . 1  
(f) 67TRW(DOI) . . . . . 1  
(g) 75TRW(DOI) . . . . . 1  
(h) 316TAW(DOX) . . . . . 1  
(i) 363TRW(DOI) . . . . . 1  
(j) 464TFW(DOI) . . . . . 1  
(k) 474TFW(DOI) . . . . . 1  
(l) 35TFW(DOI) . . . . . 1  
(m) 516TAW(DOX) . . . . . 1  
(n) 4403TFW(DOI) . . . . . 1  
(o) 58TAC FTR TNG WG. . . . . 1  
(p) 354TFW(DOI) . . . . . 1  
(q) 60MAWG(DOOXI) . . . . . 1

#### (4) TAC CENTERS, SCHOOLS

(a) USAFTAWC(DRA) . . . . . 1  
(b) USAFTFWC(DRA) . . . . . 1  
(c) USAFAGOS(EDA) . . . . . 1

### b. SAC

#### (1) HEADQUARTERS

(a) DOX . . . . . 1  
(b) XPX . . . . . 1  
(c) DM. . . . . 1  
(d) IN. . . . . 1  
(e) NR. . . . . 1  
(f) HO. . . . . 1

#### (2) AIR FORCES

(a) 2AF(INCS) . . . . . 1  
(b) 8AF(DOA) . . . . . 2  
(c) 15AF(INCE) . . . . . 1

### c. MAC

#### (1) HEADQUARTERS

(a) DOI . . . . . 1  
(b) DOO . . . . . 1  
(c) CSEH. . . . . 1  
(d) MACOA . . . . . 1

#### (2) MAC SERVICES

(a) AWS(HO) . . . . . 1  
(b) ARRS(XP) . . . . . 1  
(c) ACGS(CGO) . . . . . 1

### d. ADC

#### (1) HEADQUARTERS

(a) DO. . . . . 1  
(b) DOT . . . . . 1  
(c) XPC . . . . . 1

#### (2) AIR DIVISIONS

(a) 25AD(DOI) . . . . . 1  
(b) 23AD(DOI) . . . . . 1  
(c) 20AD(DOI) . . . . . 1

### e. ATC

(1) DOSPI . . . . . 1

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## f. AFLC

- (1) HEADQUARTERS
- (a) XOX . . . . . 1

## g. AFSC

- (1) HEADQUARTERS
- (a) XRP . . . . . 1
- (b) XRLW. . . . . 1
- (c) SAMSO(XRS). . . . . 1
- (d) SDA . . . . . 1
- (e) CSH . . . . . 1
- (f) ASD(RWST) . . . . . 1
- (g) ESD(XR) . . . . . 1
- (h) RADC(DOTL). . . . . 1
- (i) ADTC(CCN) . . . . . 1
- (j) ADTC(DLOSL) . . . . . 1
- (k) ESD(YW) . . . . . 1
- (l) AFATL(DL) . . . . . 1

## h. USAFSS

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- (1) HEADQUARTERS
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## j. PACAF

- (1) HEADQUARTERS
- (a) DP. . . . . 1
- (b) IN. . . . . 1
- (c) XP. . . . . 2
- (d) CSH . . . . . 1
- (e) DOAD. . . . . 6
- (f) DC. . . . . 1
- (g) DM. . . . . 1

- (2) AIR FORCES
- (a) 5AF
- 1. CSH. . . . . 1
- 2. XP . . . . . 1
- 3. DO . . . . . 1
- (b) Det 8, ASD(DOASD) . 1
- (c) 7AF
- 1. DO . . . . . 1
- 2. IN . . . . . 1
- 3. XP . . . . . 1
- 4. DOCT . . . . . 1
- 5. DOAC . . . . . 2
- (d) T3AF
- 1. CSH. . . . . 1
- (e) T7/13AF(CHECO) . . . 1

- (3) AIR DIVISIONS
- (a) 313AD(DOI). . . . . 1
- (b) 314AD(XOP). . . . . 2
- (c) 327AD
- 1. IN . . . . . 1
- (d) 834AD(DO) . . . . . 2

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## (4) WINGS

- (a) 8TFW(DOEA) . . . . . 1
- (b) 56SOW(WHD) . . . . . 1
- (c) 366TFW(DO) . . . . . 1
- (d) 388TFW(DO) . . . . . 1
- (e) 405TFW(DOEA) . . . . . 1
- (f) 432TRW(DOI) . . . . . 1
- (g) 483TAC ALFT WG . . . . . 1
- (h) 475TFW(DCO) . . . . . 1
- (i) 1st Test Sq(A) . . . . . 1

## (5) OTHER UNITS

- (a) Task Force ALPHA(IN) . . 1
- (b) 504TASG(DO) . . . . . 1
- (c) Air Force Advisory Gp. . 1

## k. USAFE

### (1) HEADQUARTERS

- (a) DOA. . . . . 1
- (b) DOLO . . . . . 1
- (c) DDO. . . . . 1
- (d) XDC. . . . . 1

### (2) AIR FORCES

- (a) 3AF(DO) . . . . . 2
- (b) 16AF(DO) . . . . . 1
- (c) 17AF(IN) . . . . . 1

### (3) WINGS

- (a) 50TFW(DOA) . . . . . 1
- (b) 20TFW(DOI) . . . . . 1
- (c) 401TFW(DCOI) . . . . . 1
- (d) 513TAW(DOI) . . . . . 1

## 4. SEPARATE OPERATING AGENCIES

- a. ACIC(DOP) . . . . . 2
- b. AFRES(XP) . . . . . 2
- c. AU
  - 1. ACSC-SA . . . . . 1
  - 2. AUL(SE)-69-108. . . . . 2
  - 3. ASI(ASD-1) . . . . . 1
  - 4. ASI(HOA) . . . . . 2
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## 5. MILITARY DEPARTMENTS, UNIFIED AND SPECIFIED COMMANDS, AND JOINT STAFFS

|    |  |   |
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| a. | COMUSJAPAN . . . . .   | 1 |
| b. | CINCPAC (SAG). . . . .   | 1 |
| c. | CINCPAC (J301) . . . . .   | 1 |
| d. | CINCPACFLT (Code 321). . . . .                                     | 1 |
| e. | COMUSKOREA (ATTN: J-3). . . . .                                    | 1 |
| f. | COMUSMACTHAI . . . . .   | 1 |
| g. | COMUSMACV (TSCO) . . . . .   | 1 |
| h. | COMUSTDC (J3). . . . .   | 1 |
| i. | USCINCEUR (ECJB) . . . . .   | 1 |
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| q. | JSTPS. . . . .   | 1 |
| r. | SECRETARY OF DEFENSE (OASD/SA) . . . . .                           | 1 |
| s. | CINCSTRIKE (STRJ-3). . . . .                                       | 1 |
| t. | CINCAL (HIST). . . . .   | 1 |
| u. | MAAG-CHINA/AF Section (MGAF-0) . . . . .                           | 1 |
| v. | HQ ALLIED FORCES (U.S. DOCUMENTS OFFICE) NORTHERN EUROPE . . . . . | 1 |
| w. | USMACV (MACJ031) . . . . .   | 1 |

## 6. SCHOOLS

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|    |                                      |   |
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## FOREWORD

This report describes the effects of the Consolidated Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces Improvement and Modernization Program (CRIMP) on each of the Vietnamese Air Divisions (ADs). Each chapter of this report was written by a different author. Thus, the reader has not one, but five views of American efforts to improve and modernize the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF). Each author presents the results of his own investigation, and while they generally agree on the overall success of the program, they sometimes differ on details. Problems and achievements that were significant to one author were sometimes less important to another. Therefore, each chapter of this report should be evaluated on its own merit as well as by comparison to the other four.

The history of the VNAF and the United States Air Force (USAF) advisory role in its development has been traced in three previous CHECO reports: Organization, Mission and Growth of the Vietnamese Air Force, 1949-1968; VNAF Improvement and Modernization Program [1968-1970]; and The Vietnamization of the Air War, 1970-1971.

The Vietnamization of the Air War is a companion volume to The VNAF Air Divisions: Reports on Improvement and Modernization. The former describes VNAF improvement and modernization (I&M) by mission function--"airlift" for example, or "logistics"--and thus deals with the broad outlines of the entire VNAF. The VNAF Air Divisions, on the other hand,

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focuses on one Air Division in each chapter and investigates the details of I&M at the unit level. Together, these two volumes describe the VNAF as it developed between January 1970 and July 1971.

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CHAPTER I  
THE FIRST AIR DIVISION

Military Region 1 (MR 1), the most northern of the four MRs of South Vietnam, was a mountainous jungle covered area bordered on the west by Laos, on the north by the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), on the east by the South China Sea, and on the south by South Vietnam's MR 2. The principal road in MR 1, Route 1, paralleled the coast and was at no point more than a few miles from the ocean. The major population centers, the ancient Vietnamese imperial capital of Hue and the seaport city of Da Nang, as well as many numerous small villages, were all near the coast. The rugged western half of MR 1 was sparsely populated and had few roads.

Its proximity to North Vietnam and the Laos infiltration routes and its rugged and difficult-to-reach western areas caused MR 1 to be selected by the Viet Cong (VC) and the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) as a major battle ground of the war. Numerous battles near the DMZ, at Khe Sanh, in the A Shau Valley, as well as the 1968 battle at Hue testify to the intensity of the military activity in this region. Lam Son 719, the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) incursion into Laos, and Lam Son 820, the 1971 summer ARVN campaign in western MR 1 demonstrated South Vietnamese intentions to resist the VC and the NVA. Air power--Vietnamese air power--was crucial to the ultimate success of the ARVN effort.

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### The Force in January 1970

In January 1970, the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) 41st Wing was stationed at Da Nang Air Base (AB) and was the only VNAF force in MR 1. The Wing was composed of a liaison squadron, a fighter squadron, and two helicopter squadrons. (See Figure 1.) Of the 5,125 officers, NCOs, and airmen authorized, 2,518 were assigned. (See Figure 2.) The 41st Wing had a total of 93 aircraft and 105 combat ready crews.<sup>1/</sup>

The goal of United States policy in South Vietnam during 1970 and 1971 was to train and equip the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF) so they could effectively defend South Vietnam without the armed assistance of the United States. To achieve this goal in MR 1, the 41st Wing had to be expanded from a Wing to an Air Division (AD), consisting of two Wings and supporting units. Personnel strength would increase significantly above the 2,518 personnel assigned in January 1970.<sup>2/</sup>

### Personnel

During the 17-month period ending in May 1971, many of the required 1st AD units were activated. In September 1970, the 1st AD Headquarters was activated. An Air Base Wing, a Maintenance and Support Wing, and a Combat Wing were activated in October 1970. To man these new organizations, the personnel strength of the new 1st AD increased over 50 percent by May 1971. Figure 3 depicts the increase in various grades and compares authorized to assigned manning.<sup>3/</sup> These figures seem to indicate a serious lack of experience and training, but there was no consistent

VNAF 41st WING

January 1970

| <u>Unit</u> | <u>Type</u> | Aircraft  |                    |                    |                   | Aircrews    |             |            |                 |
|-------------|-------------|-----------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-------------|-------------|------------|-----------------|
|             |             | <u>UE</u> | <u>Avg No Asgd</u> | <u>Avg No Poss</u> | <u>Avg No O/R</u> | <u>Auth</u> | <u>Form</u> | <u>C/R</u> | <u>C-Rating</u> |
| 110th       | O-1         | 20        | 19.0               | 16.2               | 14.0              | 38          | 41          | 33         | C-2             |
|             | U-17        | 10        | 9.0                | 8.0                | 6.1               |             |             |            |                 |
| 213th       | UH-1        | 20        | 21.8               | 20.8               | 14.9              | 25          | 20          | 20         | C-1             |
| 219th       | H-34        | 25        | 25.0               | 24.4               | 16.3              | 32          | 26          | 26         | C-2             |
| 516th       | A-37        | <u>18</u> | <u>18.0</u>        | <u>17.0</u>        | <u>14.2</u>       | <u>27</u>   | <u>28</u>   | <u>26</u>  | C-1             |
| Totals      |             | 93        | 92.8               | 86.4               | 65.5              | 122         | 115         | 105        |                 |

SOURCE: VNAF Status Review (January 1970)

FIGURE 1

41st WING MANNING

January 1970

|                          | Authorized  | Assigned    |
|--------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Officers                 | 812         | 336         |
| Noncommissioned Officers | 2050        | 865         |
| Airmen                   | <u>2263</u> | <u>1317</u> |
| TOTAL                    | 5125        | 2518        |

SOURCE: VNAF Status Review (February 1970)

FIGURE 2

4

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1st AIR DIVISION MANNING

31 May 1971

Officers

| <u>Grade</u> | <u>Authorized</u> | <u>Assigned</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|--------------|-------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Maj Gen      | 1                 | 0               | 0              |
| Brig Gen     | 4                 | 0               | 0              |
| Col          | 23                | 1               | 4              |
| Lt Col       | 77                | 6               | 9              |
| Major        | 215               | 39              | 18             |
| Captain      | 295               | 86              | 29             |
| Lt/Aspirant  | <u>197</u>        | <u>387</u>      | <u>194</u>     |
| TOTAL        | 812               | 519             | 63             |

Airmen

|       |            |            |            |
|-------|------------|------------|------------|
| CMSgt | 137        | 64         | 42         |
| SMSgt | 521        | 190        | 36         |
| MSgt  | 349        | 304        | 84         |
| TSgt  | 1043       | 872        | 83         |
| SSgt  | 1030       | 185        | 19         |
| Sgt   | 522        | 305        | 60         |
| A1C   | 580        | 967        | 165        |
| Amn   | <u>131</u> | <u>904</u> | <u>695</u> |
| TOTAL | 4313       | 3791       | 88         |

FIGURE 3

[REDACTED]

correlation between rank and experience in the VNAF. For example, VNAF airmen having a 5-level skill received the same consideration for promotion as airmen having a 3-level. Furthermore, when an airman advanced to a higher skill-level, he acquired an additional service commitment of several years, and there was, therefore, a reluctance on the part of some to upgrade. The grade distribution of VNAF personnel was not an accurate measure of VNAF capability. The 1st AD was a new organization in 1971, and there were significant weaknesses in skills and experience. When these were corrected, the grade distribution of VNAF personnel would not necessarily reflect it.<sup>4/</sup>

*I believe that each of the major subordinate commanders today i.e., the five Air Division Commanders, the Commander of the Air Training Center, and the Air Logistics Command, are the best people available in the VNAF. The selection of these outstanding officers for command positions--a great responsibility--attests to the wisdom and knowledge of people possessed by Major General Minh, Commander of the VNAF. I have never met a commander who has a deeper insight into the abilities and personal characteristics of his people than does General Minh. His wisdom, patience, and leadership have resulted in each of his subordinate commanders having a profound respect for his abilities, almost bordering on a god-like reverence.*

Of the VNAF commanders in the 1st AD, Colonel Surratt, Chief AFAT-1 stated: "The most significant thing I have observed is that they [the VNAF] are getting the right people into the right jobs. Slowly but surely they are getting rid of the dead wood. How they do it--their system--I just don't know, but it's working."<sup>5/</sup>



### Training

One of the key factors in ". . . getting the right people into the right jobs . . ." was training. Most of the personnel assigned to the 1st AD during this period of expansion had received rudimentary training in a skill but they lacked the necessary experience to be fully effective. On-the-job training (OJT) and the Integrated Training Program (ITP) were important vehicles for providing these newly trained men with experience. Civilian contractors at Da Nang AB also provided training for the VNAF.

ITP involved the integration of VNAF personnel into USAF units assigned at Da Nang AB. VNAF airmen worked side-by-side with an American counterpart for several months and, at the end of that period, returned to a 1st AD unit. By mid-1971 American supervisors were recommending upgrade of some trainees to a higher skill level at the conclusion of their ITP training when warranted by performance, and the VNAF generally accepted that recommendation. In June 1971, there were 250 VNAF personnel in ITP at Da Nang.<sup>6/</sup>

Civilian contractor firms at Da Nang were also hired to provide training for the VNAF. Contractor training was generally restricted to the base civil engineering functions that the VNAF must assume when the USAF 366th Tactical Fighter Wing was withdrawn.

VNAF OJT, in the long run, was the most significant form of training conducted at Da Nang AB because it built VNAF self-sufficiency. But OJT

[REDACTED]

was also the most difficult training to initiate because of operational demands on the limited number of experienced VNAF supervisors. Nevertheless, by June 1971, there were 107 VNAF personnel in OJT in the 1st AD.<sup>7/</sup>

The VNAF personnel who came out of these programs were going back to their units and doing a good job. However, the 1st AD was stretching its manpower resources to put people into these programs. The VNAF maintenance chiefs wanted to send most of their people to benefit from the training, but that left them without the necessary personnel to get the combat support jobs done. Because of this, the VNAF was unable to take full advantage of the 366th TFW training capabilities. At times, providing enough people for contractor classes nearly depleted some personnel resources. Still these programs were effective. On the other hand, the VNAF OJT program on which full self-sufficiency would ultimately depend was characterized by the AFAT-1 Training Advisor as being weak in early 1971.<sup>8/</sup> There were several reasons for this. First, there were very few trained people available to conduct OJT. Second, the Vietnamese who had not already fully committed themselves to a career were very reluctant to go through OJT and upgrade. They would incur a service commitment for upgrading, and they were reluctant to accept that commitment.<sup>9/</sup>

Technical manuals also presented a training problem. Practically all of them were written in English, but Vietnamese manuals were needed before complete self-sufficiency could be realized.<sup>10/</sup> This need had been recognized in early 1970 in a message from 7AF to CINCPACAF requesting

[REDACTED]

the development of: <sup>11/</sup>

*. . . a capability to rapidly translate USAF technical publications into the Vietnamese language. Effective training of new manpower resources depends largely on availability of an adequate instructional system and will require large amounts of reference literature. Immediate steps should be taken to identify equipment/techniques which would aid in improving a translator's skill, accuracy and speed. This may include equipment used in language laboratories, teaching machines, microfilm equipment, dictation machines, etc. This item should receive a high priority.*

In response, the Presentation of Information for Maintenance and Operation (PIMO) program was initiated to translate English manuals into Vietnamese with the aid of a computer. <sup>12/</sup>

#### Operations

##### Tactical Air Control System

An earlier CHECO report concluded that the VNAF had made great strides toward self-sufficiency in managing tactical air resources by the summer of 1969: <sup>13/</sup>

*The assignment of corps-wide responsibility to the 41st Wing appeared to be working well. I DASC controlled the frag and managed the tactical air resources for the I Corps Commander, enabling members of the Wing to develop a sense of responsibility toward the people in I Corps. The upgrading of the division TACPs held the promise that the TACPs would provide a strong subsystem to back up the nucleus of trained and experienced Vietnamese personnel at I DASC. I DASC itself was in a position to run almost independent operation. Although*

[REDACTED]

*there were areas where communication and coordination problems could occur, these problem areas were less significant than the fact that in I Corps there was a Vietnamese DASC capable of getting VNAF tactical air support for Vietnamese FACs working with Vietnamese Army units.*

In separate interviews, the Director of I DASC (VNAF)<sup>14/</sup> and the Deputy Director of I DASC (USAF)<sup>15/</sup> stated that the VNAF had the capability to operate the DASC even if the USAF departed the next day. But there were some problems yet to be solved.

The Deputy Director of I DASC identified the VNAF air liaison officers as a cause for some concern. He did not feel they were aggressive enough as advisors to the ARVN commanders. This problem had been identified earlier.<sup>16/</sup>

*There are indications that VNAF ALOs would become more competent and assume more responsibility if the MACV Advisory Teams would encourage their ARVN counterparts to deal directly with the VNAF ALO. In numerous instances the Advisory Team members go straight to the USAF ALO rather than through ARVN-VNAF channels.*

The limited operational experience of VNAF forward air controllers (FACs) also caused some concern in early 1971. The 120th Liaison Squadron had recently activated, and the core of experienced personnel for that squadron came from the 110th Liaison Squadron. The 120th Liaison Squadron would not achieve operational readiness until about 1 November 1971.

The Deputy Director of I DASC was also concerned about the apparent reluctance of VNAF FACs to do their jobs. They seemed to prefer to let

[REDACTED]

the USAF FACs do most of the work. As an example of this he cited some statistics for March 1971. During that month there were 280 fighters fragged to VNAF FACs, but there were only 101 attack sorties actually controlled by VNAF FACs. Also there were 24 fighters cancelled because of "no FAC", 20 of these were attributed to weather preventing the FAC from performing the mission while there just were no FACs available for the others. <sup>17/</sup>

On 11 May 1971, the Deputy Director of I DASC initiated a new program intended to correct this deficiency. Before this date, USAF FACs directed the fighters fragged to VNAF FACs when the VNAF FACs did not fly. This ceased with the new program except when ground situations dictated air support. If the VNAF FAC did not control the fighter fragged to him, the fighter was returned to base. Additionally, when a VNAF FAC claimed weather was preventing him from completing the mission, a USAF FAC was sent to check the weather. Between 11 and 31 May 1971, there were 587 fighters fragged to VNAF FACs and 334 fighters actually controlled by VNAF FACs. This represented an increase from the 36 percent of fragged fighters actually controlled by VNAF FACs during March, 1971 to 57 percent during the last two-thirds of May. These early statistics indicated the program would probably contribute to increased participation by VNAF FACs; however, time and other programs would probably be necessary to completely solve the problem. <sup>18/</sup>

In early 1971, liaison personnel from the 1st AD participated in Lam Son 719. <sup>19/</sup>

[REDACTED]

*First Air Division Liaison operations started on the 5th of February and continued until 31 March. Their involvement centered around the use of English speaking pilots and observers . . . as interpreters in the back seat of U.S. OV-10s. They flew 708 sorties for a total of 2,831 hours. This contingent of 27 pilots and observers plus 18 other observers from the other three military regions flew with the American personnel stationed at Quang Tri. Their joint effort helped to direct 1,942 strike sorties against the enemy. . . . No VNAF O-1 aircraft were used in Laos.*

Based on their performance, the chief of AFAT-1 decided that the 110th Liaison Squadron was self-sufficient and reassigned the advisor to the 120th Liaison Squadron. <sup>20/</sup>

When questioned on the progress of the VNAF from his point of view, the I DASC Director, a VNAF colonel, said there were two problems: people and equipment. He had only about 40 percent of authorized manpower. When I DASC was fully manned and when the new people had gained experience, that problem would largely disappear. The other problem was with existing radio equipment which he believed was inadequate. However, equipment to be provided in the I&M program was expected to alleviate this condition.

#### 41st Wing

A recent yardstick with which to gauge the combat capability of the 41st Wing was its participation in Lam Son 719, the South Vietnamese incursion into Laos in the spring of 1971. <sup>21/</sup>

[REDACTED]

*Due to Advisory Group efforts, 1st AD A-37 fighters flying from Da Nang AflD were included in the Lam Son Operation on the 4th of March, nearly one month after it started. The 41st Wing generated 1,004 sorties during this period. 7AF fragged 436 sorties into the battle area on both sides of the Laos/RVN border. The remaining (56%) sorties generated were utilized by I DASC in support of other operations. No A-37s were lost, one A-37 received battle damage (1 X 51 cal round in right main gear).*

It is important to note that the total 1,004 sorties flown between 4 and 31 March 1971 represents the efforts of only two A-37 squadrons of 18 aircraft each and only one of these squadrons was operationally ready (the 528th had just activated on 1 November 1970). The strikes in support of Lam Son 719 served to increase the confidence of the VNAF.<sup>22/</sup>

In regard to instrument capability, AFAT-1 operations advisors pointed out that 41st Wing fighter pilots were qualified. Their Sky Spot experience enhanced their capability for visual strikes under marginal weather conditions. However, the VNAF pilots tended to avoid missions during adverse weather conditions due to the lack of suitable alternate landing fields. Chu Lai was the primary alternate base but the prevailing weather there was usually similar to that at Da Nang AB, and the secondary alternate, Phu Cat AB, was some distance away.

Two statements by the officers close to the scene best summarized the fighter capability of the 41st Wing. "I honestly feel that with a few insignificant exceptions, they can do the mission as it now stands."<sup>23/</sup> "If there is a TIC (Troops-in-Contact) in the area, don't stand in their way because they're going."<sup>24/</sup>

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VNAF A-37 AIRCRAFT

FIGURE 4

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### 51st Wing

In June 1970, the 213th and 219th helicopter squadrons were part of the 41st Tactical Wing. Both squadrons were manned with experienced pilots and crews. The 219th was only H-34 squadron in the VNAF. It was fully combat ready and remained relatively stable throughout 1971. In August 1970, the 213th Helicopter Squadron began providing pilots for new squadrons throughout South Vietnam. This severely taxed the 213th as it was just acquiring gunships and preparing for combat assault operations. This shift of crews was necessary to meet the requirements of the I&M program. In mid-1970, the squadron had 22 operationally ready aircrews. The pilots were all highly experienced. Most of them had more than 1,500 hours flying time, and many had more than 2,000 hours. Between August 1970 and January 1971, the 213th trained 25 copilots, 18 first pilots, 8 aircraft commanders, and 4 instructor pilots. Even with all this training activity, the 213th was down to a total of 13 aircraft commanders and first pilots by mid-January 1971. Only about six of the original line pilots remained. The other experienced pilots had been transferred to newly formed UH-1H squadrons or the CH-47 squadron.

After January 1971, the squadron was able to retain the pilots it trained. It was authorized 31 aircrews and by April, twenty-five crews were combat ready. This squadron had essentially trained a complete new squadron of aircraft commanders and first pilots for the I&M program and brought itself back to a combat ready status. All this training

[REDACTED]

was accomplished while fulfilling combat requirements.

While completing this training, the squadron had also trained pilots and mission commanders for gunship combat assault operations. After September 1970, the squadron conducted several all Vietnamese (VNAF-ARVN) combat assaults and completed them in a professional manner.

AFAT-1 coordinated the United States Army Training of 65 VNAF helicopter pilots. Twenty pilots were trained at Marble Mountain near Da Nang AB to form a cadre for the new 233d Helicopter Squadron. They were in training from October to December 1970. Twenty-five other pilots were trained in MR 2 to supplement the 213th Squadron. This training was completed between November 1970 and April 1971. In mid-1971, 20 VNAF pilots were still flying with the United States Army to gain additional flying experience. In October 1970, the 51st Tactical Wing was formed as the command unit of the 213th, 219th, and 233d Helicopter Squadrons.

The 233d Helicopter Squadron began receiving its aircraft in January 1971. In order to accept them, a large portion of the ramp area at Da Nang AB had to be reconfigured with revetments suitable for UH-1Hs. This work was started by a Red Horse Team in December 1970 and completed the following month. The full complement of squadron aircraft (31) was received by late January. Training activities in the 233d Squadron were delayed due to Lam Son 719 operations. The aircraft and aircrews of both

[REDACTED]

the 213th and 233d Squadrons were used to support that operation.

Limited training continued in the 233d Squadron during Lam Son 719 and accelerated in early April. By mid-April, eighteen pilots were formally upgraded to first pilot. U.S. Army augmentees provided much of the instruction, particularly for gunship pilots. The squadron pilots were relatively inexperienced, averaging about 550 hours flying time. However, they did gain limited combat experience in Lam Son 719 and were expected to be combat ready by the end of August. <sup>25/</sup>

The summary of the 51st Wing support of Lam Son 719 is as follows: <sup>26/</sup>

*The 1st AD involvement started on 2 February 1971, with the deployment of 51st Tactical Wing Helicopters to Dong Ha. From that time until the main force redeployed on 31 March, the helicopters flew 5,516 sorties for a total of 3,058 hours. There was an average of 16 operational helicopters at Dong Ha. The composition of this force was 11 slicks, 4 gunships and one command and control aircraft. Daily flying time for the total package ranged from a maximum of 100 hours to zero hours depending on the weather. Their primary mission was to transport troops and supplies into forward locations and fire bases in Laos. They also flew medical evacuation missions. During the operation five UH-1Hs and two H-34s aircraft were shot down and destroyed by enemy ground fire. Twenty-two other aircraft received major battle damage requiring an average of 30 days per aircraft to repair. Fourteen UH-1Hs and two H-34s received minor battle damage which required an average of five days per aircraft to repair. . . . While the primary mission of these aircraft was not to place ordnance against the enemy, they did expend 505 rockets and 227,000 rounds of 7.62 (MM) ammunition. No record of damage to the enemy was kept by the VNAF. They medevaced 3,300 wounded ARVN soldiers, 245 dead, 8,100 troops and 268 tons of cargo.*

[REDACTED]

The Lam Son 719 effort also served to bring out certain shortcomings of the 51st Wing helicopter force. Because they lacked heavy lift helicopter capability at that time (they were scheduled to receive CH-47s in May 1972), they had to depend on United States Army help to extract damaged UH-1Hs and return them to Da Nang AB for repair. Since the United States Army had higher priorities, there were delays which allowed the damaged aircraft to be stripped of critical parts. Additionally, the campaign highlighted the thin core of expertise in the 51st Wing. There were not enough test pilots available to keep up with the needed functional check flights because all the best pilots were operating from forward operating locations (FOLs) in support of combat operations. USAF advisory personnel helped maintain the aircraft incommission rate by flying many of the test flights for the VNAF.<sup>27/</sup>

A serious problem had earlier been noted by Brig. Gen. Young in his End-of-Tour Report:<sup>28/</sup>

*As withdrawal of U.S. units continues, the helicopter resources formerly provided by the U.S. Army will constantly shrink so that eventually the RVNAF surface forces will be reduced to only that helicopter support which can be provided by the VNAF. This will be approximately one-tenth of the force formerly enjoyed. We are already beginning to see one result with various charges of unresponsiveness being leveled against the VNAF by senior ARVN commanders, and counter charges leveled by the VNAF against ARVN forces for poor, ineffective, and inefficient use of helicopter resources.*

At the time of this report, the U.S. Army and Air Force Advisors in MR 1 were trying to get the ARVN and VNAF to initiate a program to

[REDACTED]

alleviate this problem. A recent Joint General Staff directive in regard to utilization of the VNAF helicopter resources was expected to furnish the needed impetus to the ARVN and the VNAF to start using VNAF helicopters to their fullest extent.\* This directive provided the guidance needed to properly manage the limited helicopter resources. <sup>29/</sup>

In spite of the numerous problems facing the flying squadrons, the USAF advisors were unanimous in their opinion that the VNAF in MR 1 was nearing self-sufficiency. In the advisors' opinion the pacing factor for the entire I&M effort was supply. <sup>30/</sup>

#### Supply

In addition to increasing numbers of aircraft in the VNAF inventory and significant unit activations and reorganizations during this period, the VNAF supply system was converted from a manual to a computer operation. Foreseeably, this caused some initial difficulty and a deterioration in supply responsiveness. Although the Air Logistics Command (ALC) depot had a UNIVAC 1050-II computer installed in March 1970, equipment delays prevented Da Nang from being "satellited" into the computer at ALC.

After the equipment was installed, time was needed to develop a smooth flowing supply system. In the meantime, lack of a responsive supply system hampered progress. Parts and repair kits were difficult

\* The Joint General Staff Directive referred to is number 310-19 which provided for management of the helicopter force. For a through discussion of this directive see the CHECO report titled "The Vietnamization of the Air War, 1970 - 1971."

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to get in many instances. The supply of hand tools was short. The VNAF lacked many of the specialized maintenance tools the USAF considered necessary.<sup>31/</sup> Shops were short of technical orders (TOs) and this shortage of TOs was aggravated by the language problem. That is, all of the available TOs were in English whereas Vietnamese TOs were needed.<sup>32/</sup>

The following examples illustrate supply problems. In 1971, some H-34 TOs had been on order for two years. Periodic reorders had been sent without results. Some UH-1H TOs had been on order for 15 months; 1st AD had received about 100 copies of a checklist for UH-1Fs, a helicopter they did not even have.<sup>33/</sup> The munitions team was fully trained, but they could not really be considered self-sufficient because they did not own the special tools, clothing, or vehicles needed to do their job. They had to borrow these from the 366th TFW. If the 366th left before the VNAF received its own equipment, there would be no munitions capability at Da Nang.<sup>34/</sup>

Certain characteristics of the Vietnamese people presented problems in developing a solid support capability. They were reluctant to sign for the tools which were available in supply for fear of having them stolen. They could not afford to pay for a missing tool and preferred to have an advisor borrow the tool for them. They were reluctant to go to their superiors for help, and they were equally reluctant to request assistance from collateral units. The advisors were useful to the Vietnamese in this instance because the Vietnamese were not reluctant to ask an advisor

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for assistance; and the advisor could then go to the other VNAF unit and borrow equipment for them. This practice subverted VNAF self-sufficiency and the advisors tried to avoid it. The trade-off between cultural background and necessity, however, was difficult to make. <sup>35/</sup>

In spite of the training problems, the lack of appropriate TOs and equipment, and cultural difficulties, the 1st AD was developing a support capability. The Vietnamese learned by rote. They observed something done properly a few times, and then they could do it. This ability amazed the advisors. VNAF maintenance men learned how to perform complex tasks without special tools. They were able to do more with less than the USAF advisors thought possible. <sup>36/</sup>

The VNAF motor pool provided another set of problems characteristic of the I&M effort. In May 1971, the motor pool had approximately 300 vehicles of which there were about 100 different makes and types. The vehicle mix was a result of taking whatever was available. This situation caused a tremendous parts and maintenance problem. The problem was intensified by many of the vehicles being so old that parts were almost impossible to get. Additionally, the parts problem was complicated because once the VNAF accepted a vehicle from the U.S. Air Force, the ARVN assumed supply responsibility for it. (This same situation applied to any civil engineering equipment as well.) Since the ARVN did not have enough parts for its own vehicles and equipment, the VNAF had a great deal of trouble keeping things running. It took six months to a year to get

[REDACTED]

some parts; therefore, the already short supply of vehicles was further reduced because of out-of-commission time.<sup>37/</sup>

In April 1971, AFAT-1 advisors estimated that the 1st AD was about 60 percent self-sufficient in support operations. They estimated that in view of existing problems, it would take several years before the 1st AD would be completely self-sufficient.<sup>38/</sup>

### Facilities Transfer

Through most of the period covered by this report, there were large numbers of United States Marines at Da Nang to support the war effort in MR 1 and to guard the base perimeter. These units occupied many facilities which were needed by the VNAF before I&M could move forward at a rapid rate. As late as November 1970, this problem was still acute as pointed out in a message from 7AF to CINCPACAF--"Complete resolution to the Da Nang problem is dependent on withdrawal of Marines from Da Nang."<sup>39/</sup> Additionally, there was a large USAF component at Da Nang which occupied facilities needed by the VNAF. The 7AF Commander had stated on 26 June 1970 that the I&M program should be given equal priority to the combat mission of 7AF.<sup>40/</sup> The trade-off decisions were exceedingly difficult.<sup>41/</sup> This situation was summarized in a 7AF briefing in December, 1970.

*The plan necessary to provide the required facilities at Da Nang Air Base has developed into a very interesting exercise, or possibly best described as a game of checkers. The intricate on-base moves that have been made to accommodate the VNAF I&M program would be difficult to*

[REDACTED]

*describe. The strategic geographic location of Da Nang, dictated continued operational requirements, therefore, 7AF has recommended minimum withdrawal actions. The Marines broke the critical situation in August when they started their withdrawal actions. These actions vacated space on the west side of the base and enabled the 366th TFW to plan a series of moves, relocating functions and units from the east, to the west side of the base. . . .We expect complete Marine withdrawal by FY/4/71 and can now confirm that the I&M program will proceed on schedule with a continued transfer of USAF activities and functions from the east to the west side of the base. This complements the RVN Master Plan for Da Nang, which places the VNAF military on the east and civilian activities on the west side of the base.*

In March 1971, the transfer of facilities at Da Nang AB was behind schedule.

Great strides were being made in providing base housing for VNAF personnel at Da Nang AB, but by 1 May 1971, 740 units were still needed.<sup>42/</sup> VNAF airmen and their families had difficulty finding adequate shelter. Some families were living in converted dog kennels.<sup>43/</sup> These conditions were primitive by Vietnamese standards and had an adverse effect on morale.

Figure 5 shows men of the ARVN 8th Construction Group working on a family housing project at Da Nang. The ARVN was responsible for furnishing the manpower for construction while the VNAF was responsible for providing the materials such as cement blocks.<sup>44/</sup> Figure 6 shows an aerial view contrasting the new family housing units under construction with some of the older housing and make-shift shelters.

The family units shown would hold 10 families each. They represent the kind of ingenuity seen in the I&M program at Da Nang. The design

**UNCLASSIFIED**



CONSTRUCTION OF FAMILY UNITS, DA NANG

FIGURE 5

24

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AERIAL VIEW OF FAMILY UNITS, DA NANG

FIGURE 6

**UNCLASSIFIED**

[REDACTED]

was already available. It was an ARVN field design which was relatively inexpensive and easy to build. Thirty such 10-family units were planned. However, these units were also representative of the type of problems encountered in the I&M program. As can be seen in Figure 6, the roof in both the front and rear sections of each unit sloped toward the open patio area in the middle. It was originally designed this way to allow water collection, and it was efficient at this. On the other hand, these family units were on base where water was readily available. The families who moved into the first unit all elected to cover the patio to gain the added space, but this was difficult because of the water drainage direction of the roof. Had the roof slanted toward the front and rear of the units, their problem would have been greatly simplified. Attempts were made to make this change in later units.<sup>45/</sup>

### Conclusions

As of May 31, 1971, the I&M program in MR 1 was making good progress toward the goal of VNAF self-sufficiency. Unit activations were on schedule. Fighter and helicopter squadrons were maturing, and they demonstrated great promise of future capabilities by their actions in support of Lam Son 719. There were still problems in the FAC and ALO functions, but there was progress toward solutions with the delivery of better equipment and the assignment of more experienced officers. Operational support areas were weak because of a shortage of skilled technicians and would probably prove to be the pacing factor of the I&M program.

**SECRET**

There was no way of instantaneously supplying newly trained men with the necessary skills gained by experience; this would take time. Supply problems hampered both operational and base support personnel, and this, in turn, reduced combat capability. There was a shortage of VNAF housing and facilities at Da Nang AB.

AFAT-1 advisors and the 1st AD VNAF Commanders were dedicated to meeting the goals of VNAF self-sufficiency. In mid-1971, they looked forward to the challenge with confidence.

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## FOOTNOTES

### CHAPTER I

1. (S) VNAF Status Review (January 1970), p. G-2.
2. (C) Ibid. (September 1971), p. B-9.
3. (S) Interview with Capt. W. Lynch, Personnel Advisor, AFAT-1, 9 June 1971, by Maj D. H. Roe.
4. (C/NF) "End-of-Tour Report," Brigadier General Kendall S. Young, Chief, USAF Advisory Group, 15 February 1971.
5. (C/NF) Interview with Col Maurice D. Surrat, Chief, AFAT-1, 15 May 1971, by Maj D. H. Roe.
6. (U) VNAF Status Review (June 1971), p. D-11.
7. (U) Ibid., p. D-14.
8. (C/NF) Lynch Interview.
9. (C/NF) Group Interview with Maintenance and Supply Advisors, AFAT-1, 13 May 1971, by Maj D. H. Roe. (Hereafter cited as Group Interview.)
10. (U) Interview with Lt Col Thu (VNAF), Da Nang Air Base Wing Commander and Maj Nguyen Tan Dinh (VNAF), 1st AD Support Group Commander, 14 May 1971, by Maj D. H. Roe.
11. (S) Msg, Hq 7AF to CINCPACAF, 041055Z Feb 1970, Subj: R & D in Support of Vietnamization.
12. (U) Thu and Dinh Interview.
13. (S) CHECO Report, Direct Air Support Centers in I Corps, p. 64.
14. (U) Interview with Lt Col Hoat (VNAF), Director of I DASC, 13 May 1971, by Maj D. H. Roe.
15. (S/NF) Interview with Col B. H. Barton, Deputy Director of I DASC, 13 May 1971, by Maj D. H. Roe.
16. (S/NF) Ibid.

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17. (S/NF) Ibid.
18. (S/NF) Ibid.
19. (C) Ltr, AFAT-1 (CH) to AFGP (CDE), 6 May 1971, Subj: Summary of 1st AD Participation in Lam Son 719.
20. (C/NF) Surratt Interview.
21. (C) Ltr, 1st AD Participation in Lam Son 719.
22. (C/NF) Surratt Interview.
23. (C/NF) Interview with Lt Col H. H. Pierson, Operations Advisor, AFAT-1, 14 May 1971, by Maj D. H. Roe.
24. (C/NF) Interview with Lt Col J. E. Musgrove, AFAT-1, 13 May 1971, by Maj D. H. Roe.
25. (C/NF) Working paper, May 1971, Lt Col Floyd K. Houchin, 51st Wing Commander Advisor.
26. (C) Ltr, 1st AD Participation in Lam Son 719.
27. (C) Ibid.
28. (C/NF) Young, "End-of-Tour Report."
29. (C/NF) Interview with Maj R. W. Wyatt, 51st Wing Advisor, 14 May 1971, by Maj D. H. Roe.
30. (C/NF) Pierson Interview.
31. (C/NF) Group Interview.
32. (C/NF) Ibid.
33. (C/NF) Surratt Interview.
34. (C) Interview with Capt D. S. Standish, AFAT-1 Munitions Advisor, 14 May 1971, by Maj D. H. Roe.
35. (C/NF) Group Interview.

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- 36. (C/NF) Ibid.
- 37. (U) Thu and Dinh Interview.
- 38. (C/NF) Group Interview.
- 39. (S) Msg, 7AF to CINCPACAF, 16 Nov 1970, 130700Z, November 1970, Subj: October 1970 Monthly Narrative Report on VNAF I&M.
- 40. (C) Young, "End-of-Tour Report."
- 41. (S) Briefing, 3 December 1970, by Lt Col J. A. Porter, 7AF DCS Programs/XP, Subj: Unit and Base Withdrawal Plans Related to VNAF 1971 Requirements.
- 42. (U) Thu and Dinh Interview.
- 43. (C/NF) Group Interview.
- 44. (U) Interview with Lt Col A. Totterdell, AFAT-1 Support Advisor, 14 May 1971, by Maj D. H. Roe.
- 45. (U) Ibid.

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CHAPTER II  
THE SECOND AIR DIVISION

Military Region 2 (MR 2) comprised the Central Highlands area of South Vietnam and the coastal areas east of the Central Highlands. It contained 12 provinces and approximately half the land area of the Republic of Vietnam. Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) combat operations in MR 2 were carried out by the Second Air Division (2d AD) to support the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) Second Corps. Like the other four air divisions, the 2d AD consisted of two tactical wings. In addition to its two permanent bases at Nha Trang and Pleiku, the 2d AD had 11 Forward Operating Locations (FOLs) to support the ARVN. The FOLs for the 22d Division (ARVN) were Kontum, Bong Son, Qui Nhon, Cheo Reo, and Dong Tac, and for the 23d Division they were Ban Me Thuot, Gia Nghia, Bao Loc, Cam Ly (Dalat), Phan Thiet, and Song Mao. The planned distribution of air and ground forces is depicted on the accompanying map.<sup>1/</sup> In mid-1971, it appeared that additional permanent bases would be added--probably at Phu Cat and Phan Rang--but plans were indefinite.

The 62d Tactical Wing located with the Air Division Headquarters at Nha Trang AB was the nucleus of the 2d AD. At the beginning of the I&M effort, approximately March of 1968, the 62d Wing had three squadrons: the 114th Liaison Squadron equipped with O-1s and U-17s, the 215th Helicopter Squadron equipped with H-34s, and 524th Fighter

MILITARY REGION 2

AIR & GROUND

ORDER OF BATTLE

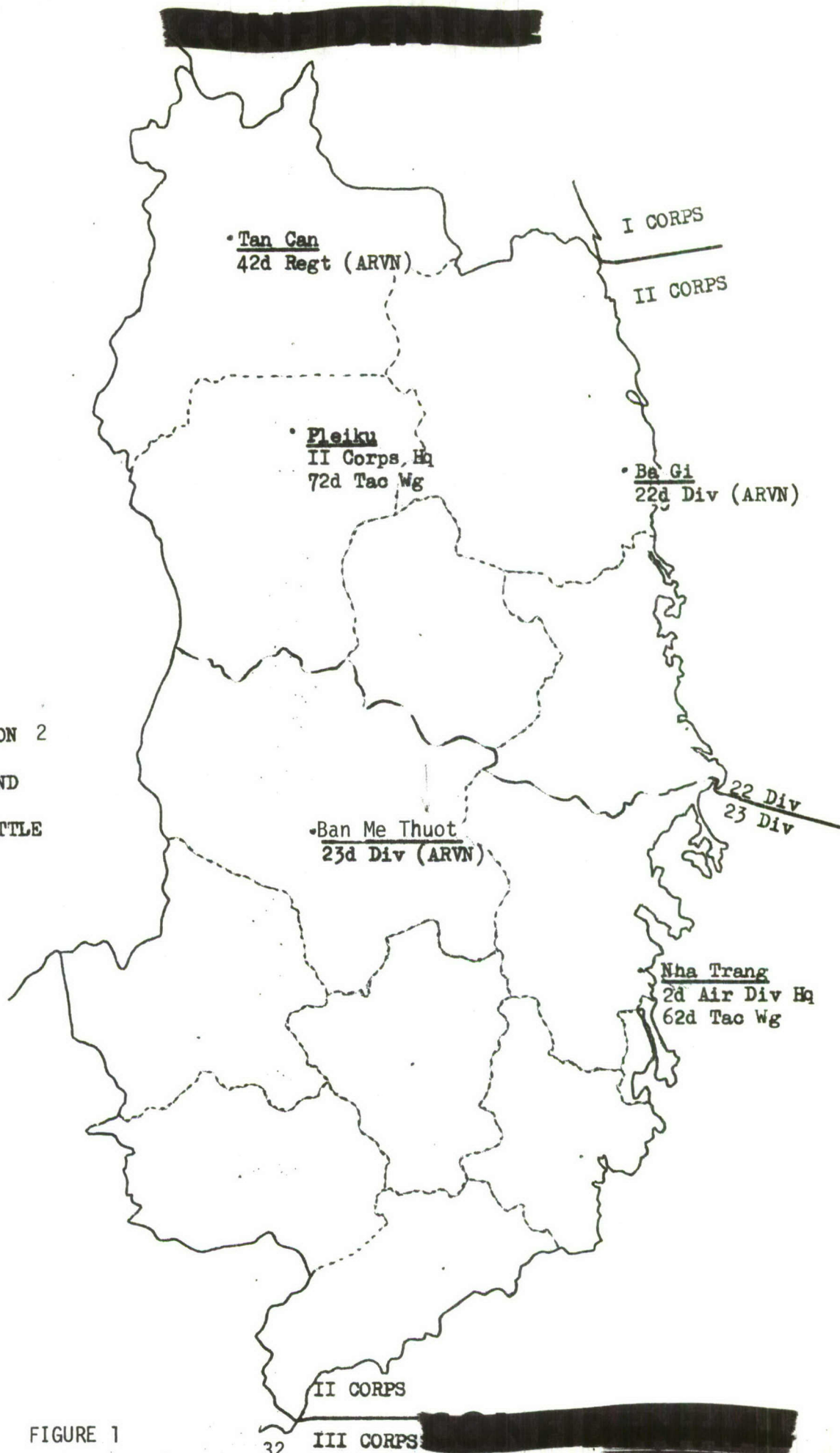


FIGURE 1

[REDACTED]

Squadron which was standing down to transition from A-1s to A-37s. The Wing had a total of 2,209 personnel and 35 aircraft. These units were reorganized on 1 June 1970 when the 2d AD was activated. A month later, the Nha Trang Air Base Wing and the 2d Maintenance and Supply Wing were also activated. By this time, the 524th had transitioned to A-37s and the 215th had converted to the UH-1H "Huey."<sup>2/</sup>

Nha Trang AB, built by the French in 1949, was one of the oldest air bases in the country. It had been expanded to support USAF tactical air operations and had a 6,166 foot asphalt runway, parallel taxiways, and 307,960 square yards of parking area with open revetments to accommodate all the assigned aircraft. It was jointly occupied by the VNAF Air Training Center\* and the 2d Air Division.<sup>3/</sup>

The 62d Tactical Wing was composed of some of the most experienced units and personnel in the VNAF. The 524th Fighter Squadron had been formed in 1965 and equipped with the A-1. It later became the second jet squadron in the VNAF and the first to acquire the mainstay of the fighter force, the A-37 "Dragonfly."<sup>4/</sup> The experience level of the pilots, while diluted somewhat by the necessity to form cadres for newer units, remained impressive with an average total flying time of 2,214 hours and an average of 785 combat sorties.\*\*<sup>5/</sup> The 215th Helicopter Squadron was the third oldest in the VNAF. The 114th Liaison Squadron organized in 1956 was also assigned to the 62d Wing.<sup>6/</sup>

\*The Air Training Center was responsible to HQ VNAF and was, therefore, not an MR 2 function.

\*\*The ranges were 672 to 3,809 hours and 275 to 1,242 sorties.

[REDACTED]

Two more squadrons were planned for the 62d Wing in later stages of the I&M program. The 817th Combat Squadron with AC-47s was to move from Tan Son Nhut Air Base (AB) in August 1971. Though assigned at Nha Trang AB, these aircraft would be deployed to other bases. After transfer, three AC-47s and six aircrews would be "coordinated for a long period at Binh Thuy," meaning, apparently, that they would be indefinitely deployed there.<sup>7/</sup> Two aircraft would be dispatched nightly to Pleiku until they were replaced by three aircraft and six aircrews on TDY there beginning on 10 September 1971. Until that date, this detachment would remain at Tan Son Nhut.<sup>8/</sup> Finally, the 534th Fighter Squadron was to activate in November 1971 and fly the A-1.<sup>9/</sup>

Pleiku AB, home of the 72d Wing, was located in the Central Highlands. It had a 6,000 foot asphalt runway, parallel taxiways, and 168,820 square yards of parking ramps with open revetments. There were two "Singapore hangars" (revetments with nonreinforced roofs) and limited shed-style hangar space. Also located at Pleiku was the 921st Control and Reporting Post (CRP). The headquarters for the ARVN II Corps and the II Direct Air Support Center (DASC) were located adjacent to the base.<sup>10/</sup>

The 72d Tactical Wing offered a definite contrast to the experience of the 62nd at Nha Trang. The Wing was new, having been activated on 1 September 1970, and was composed of all new squadrons. The 530th Fighter Squadron, with A-1s, and the 229th Helicopter Squadron, with UH-1Hs, were activated on 1 December 1970.<sup>11/</sup> Both were able to attain

[REDACTED]

Operationally Ready (OR) status ahead of schedule. The 530th became OR on 1 March 1971, three months early, <sup>12/</sup> and the 229th on 25 May 1971, <sup>13/</sup> 95 days earlier.

The 235th Helicopter Squadron (UH-1Hs) was activated on 1 February 1971, and the 118th Liaison Squadron (O-1s/U-17s) on 1 April 1971. Both were still in training, although both were also flying combat sorties at a reduced rate commensurate with their non-OR status. Still to be added was the 243d Helicopter Squadron, scheduled to be activated with UH-1Hs on 1 March 1972. <sup>14/</sup>

As of 30 April 1971, the 2d AD had 4,849 personnel assigned and possessed 175 of an authorized 179 aircraft. Figures 2 through 4 portray the growth of the Division and its organization strength.\*

#### Pleiku Air Base

In the mountainous areas of South Vietnam there lived a people who were distinctly non-Vietnamese. These Malayo-Polynesian and Mon-Khmer speaking people were displaced from the coastal regions when the Vietnamese spread southward from their original homes in the Red River Valley in the 15th and 16th centuries. Together with the Tai tribes of the north and several smaller non-Vietnamese groups, these people were called the Montagnards by the French. <sup>15/</sup>

\*Final beddown and equipment decisions were still being made at the time of this writing. Possible changes included A-37s vice A-1s for the 534th, the 243d at Phu Cat vice Pleiku, and addition of a C-7 squadron.

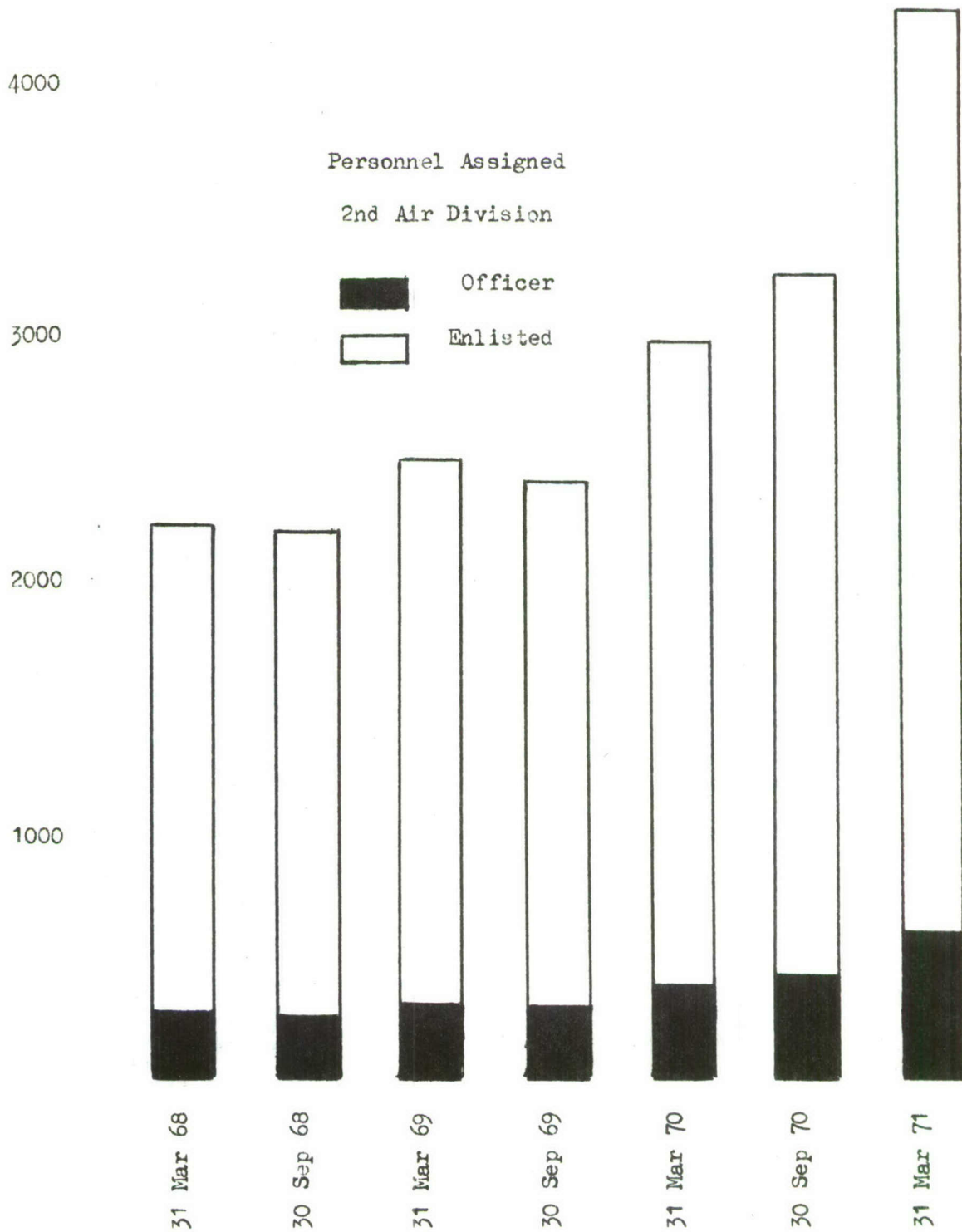


FIGURE 2

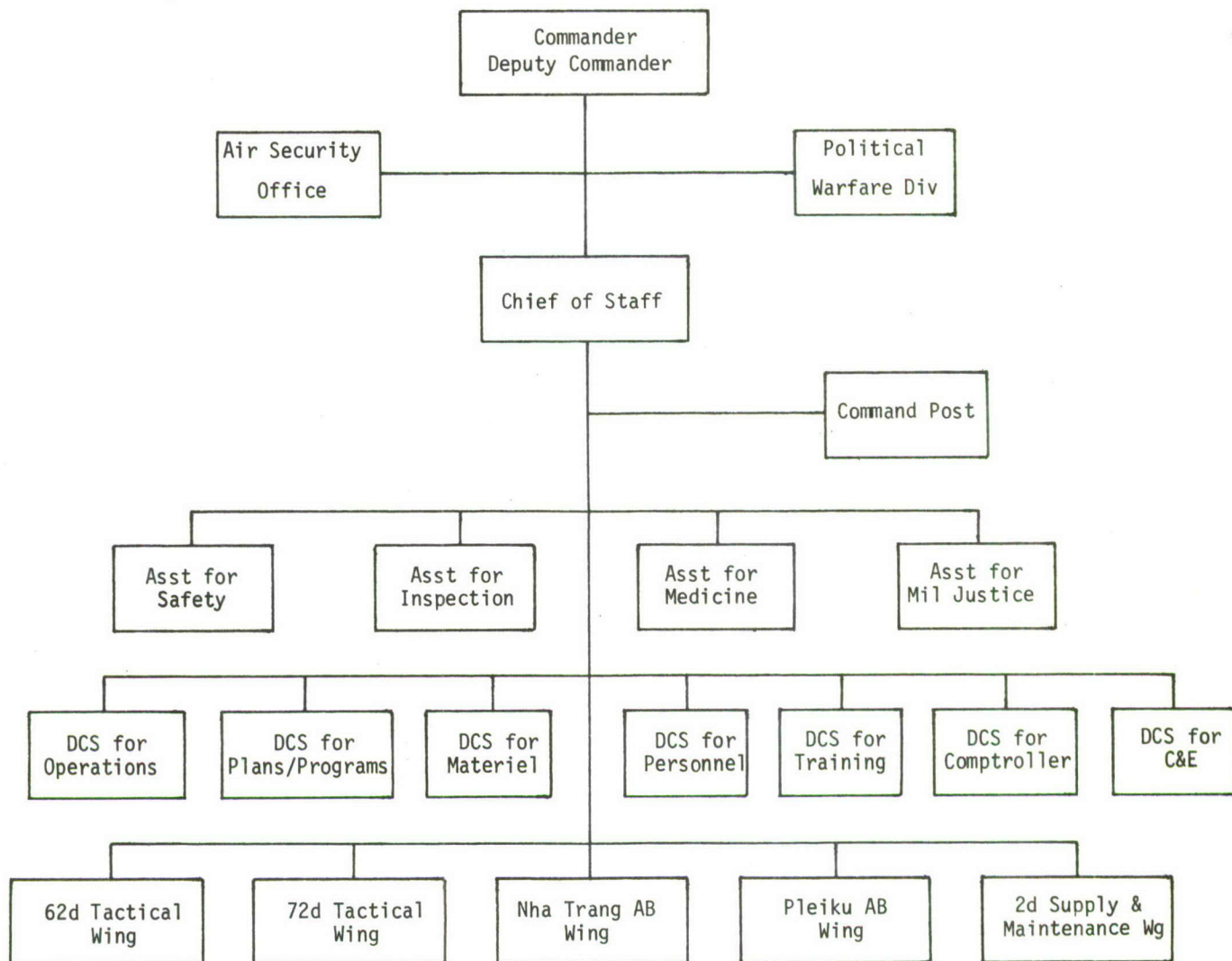
## 2nd Air Division

(Dates in parentheses  
indicate projected  
data.)

| Aircraft Possessed                              |                              |
|---|------------------------------|
| 2nd Air Division                                |                              |
| (Dates in parentheses indicate projected data.) |                              |
| 31 Mar 68                                       | H34 O-1/U-17                 |
| 30 Sep 68                                       | O-1/U-17                     |
| 31 Mar 69                                       | H34 O-1/U-17 A-37            |
| 30 Sep 69                                       | UH-1H O-1/U-17 A-37          |
| 31 Mar 70                                       | UH-1H O-1/U-17 A-37          |
| 30 Sep 70                                       | UH-1H O-1/U-17 A-37          |
| 31 Mar 71                                       | UH-1H O-1/U-17 A-1 A-37      |
| (30 Sep 71)                                     | UH-1H O-1/U-17 A-1 A-37 AC47 |
| (31 Mar 72)                                     | UH-1H O-1/U-17 A-1 A-37 AC47 |
| (30 Sep 72)                                     | UH-1H O-1/U-17 A-1 A-37 AC47 |
| (31 Mar 73)                                     | UH-1H O-1/U-17 A-1 A-37 AC47 |

FIGURE 3

# 2D AIR DIVISION



UMT Manning: 863 Officers  
2430 NCOs  
2699 Airmen

UE Aircraft: 40 O-1  
10 U-17  
93 UH-1  
18 A-37  
18 A-1

(Figures as of 30 June 1971)

SOURCES: VNAF Status Review, May 1971 and VNAF Programming Plan 70-3, dated 15 April 1970, as amended.

FIGURE 4

[REDACTED]

Although these people inhabited both MR 1 and MR 2, and 2d AD had the only operational bases located among them. Pleiku was a relatively small rural city with few native Vietnamese inhabitants. It was at an elevation of 2,500 feet and noticeably cooler than the more populated areas of South Vietnam. Because of its isolated location, commodities of all types except those locally produced were in short supply. Housing was very limited and the cost of living was well above the average.<sup>16/</sup> Pleiku was considered a "hardship" tour by the VNAF.

This situation caused several repercussions. The first, and most important was the fixed two-year assignment at Pleiku AB. This caused a constant turnover of qualified personnel. Since it was a hardship assignment, there seemed to be a tendency to assign men there who were less desirable to their former units. This condition was revealed informally by a Vietnamese lieutenant sent there on TDY during a deployment. On entering a maintenance shop of the 530th Fighter Squadron, he laughingly told the American advisor that all the men he saw there were ones he had trouble with in the past.<sup>17/</sup> For example, this quotation from the advisor to the 118th:<sup>18/</sup>

*Four additional pilots came from the ---th. One has been rated almost two years, has only 250 hours total flying time and one accident that I know of. The other three have been rated about one year and have only 165 hours average apiece. It appears to me that /they/ pushed off their problem pilots on the 118th, a good way to get rid of their weaker pilots.*

[REDACTED]

Morale was affected also. Two items which seemed small to Americans affected the Vietnamese strongly. First was the climate which although still pleasantly warm to the advisors, the Vietnamese complained of the cold and dampness during the rainy season. The other was the lack of fish, a staple in the Vietnamese (as opposed to Montagnard) diet. One of the first activities of the 72d Wing was the construction, on a self-help basis, of fish ponds for each squadron and activity. In these, the Vietnamese would be able to raise their own fish.<sup>19/</sup>

As at all VNAF bases, construction of Vietnamese family housing was underway. At Pleiku, though, it took on added importance since many families had to be left behind in Nha Trang until housing was available at Pleiku. The VNAF had no family separation or cost-of-living allowance.<sup>20/</sup>

#### Nha Trang Air Base

Nha Trang was a resort town on the central coast with a history of association with the Vietnamese Air Force. On a bluff to the south of town, Vice President (and former VNAF commander) Nguyen Cao Ky owned a large house to which he frequently returned.

The town's main feature was a long beach front boulevard lined on one side with large villas from the days of French rule (many of the villas were used during the war as military headquarters) and on

[REDACTED]

the other side with public beaches and parks. Like all Vietnamese cities, Nha Trang was overcrowded due to the war; its city facilities were overburdened and the cost of living was inflated. Despite all this, it was a good assignment for the VNAF officer or airman. It was comparatively safe, the climate was pleasant, and the air base was conveniently on the edge of town. The crowds of young airmen--many of them trainees from the Air Training Center--at the refreshment stands and in the parks along the beach each evening gave it the appearance of a leave center. What disadvantages there were for the serviceman were those that Nha Trang shared with all other bases.

### Training

The 2d AD, like all of the VNAF, was as heavily involved in training as in combat. The rapid pace of activations was being carried out in the face of major shortages, not just of aircrews and command personnel, but of all skills and skill levels. Virtually every reported slippage in the 2d AD I&M schedule was due, at least in part, to "lack of trained personnel." Typical was the analysis of the slippage of the Supply Squadron, 72d Technical Group at Pleiku in March 1971. <sup>21/</sup>

*The Supply Squadron was scheduled to be completed in December 1970; however, it remains slipped due to the lack of trained personnel. Although the squadron is 79.7 percent manned, 49.9 percent of the assigned personnel are "three" levels who have just recently completed the formal "three" level training program. The lack of trained personnel is also delaying development of operating instructions.\**

\*A "three level" AFSC, as in the USAF, was\*the lowest of four skill levels. It meant the man was trained, but inexperienced.

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The I&M program in MR 2 was, of necessity, primarily a training program. The urgency arising from combat and the increasing pace of U.S. withdrawals gave rise, however, to a conflict in the perceived priorities of the advisors. While realizing that their goal was VNAF self-sufficiency and the development of skills, the necessity to get the job done occasionally led them to do the task themselves. In other words, the latter part of the Advisory Group's motto: "Advise and Assist," sometimes took precedence over the former.<sup>22/</sup>

Affecting the on-the-job training program at both 2d AD bases was the working schedule of the VNAF airman--24 hours on duty, then 24 hours off. This schedule was necessary because the men had to have a civilian job to augment their VNAF pay in order to sustain themselves and their families. Alterations in this schedule, or overtime, would interfere with off-duty employment. VNAF supervisors were very reluctant to disrupt this schedule.<sup>23/</sup>

A problem existed, too, in the assignment and use of skill level codes. In many cases, the possession of a "three level" AFSC did not mean that the airman was not experienced. There was a reluctance to upgrade since by doing so an additional service obligation was incurred.<sup>24/</sup>

#### Operations

The progress of the VNAF in assuming the responsibility for tactical air operations in MR 2 is reflected in Figures 5 and 6. The increased percentage of strike sorties flown by the VNAF is certainly

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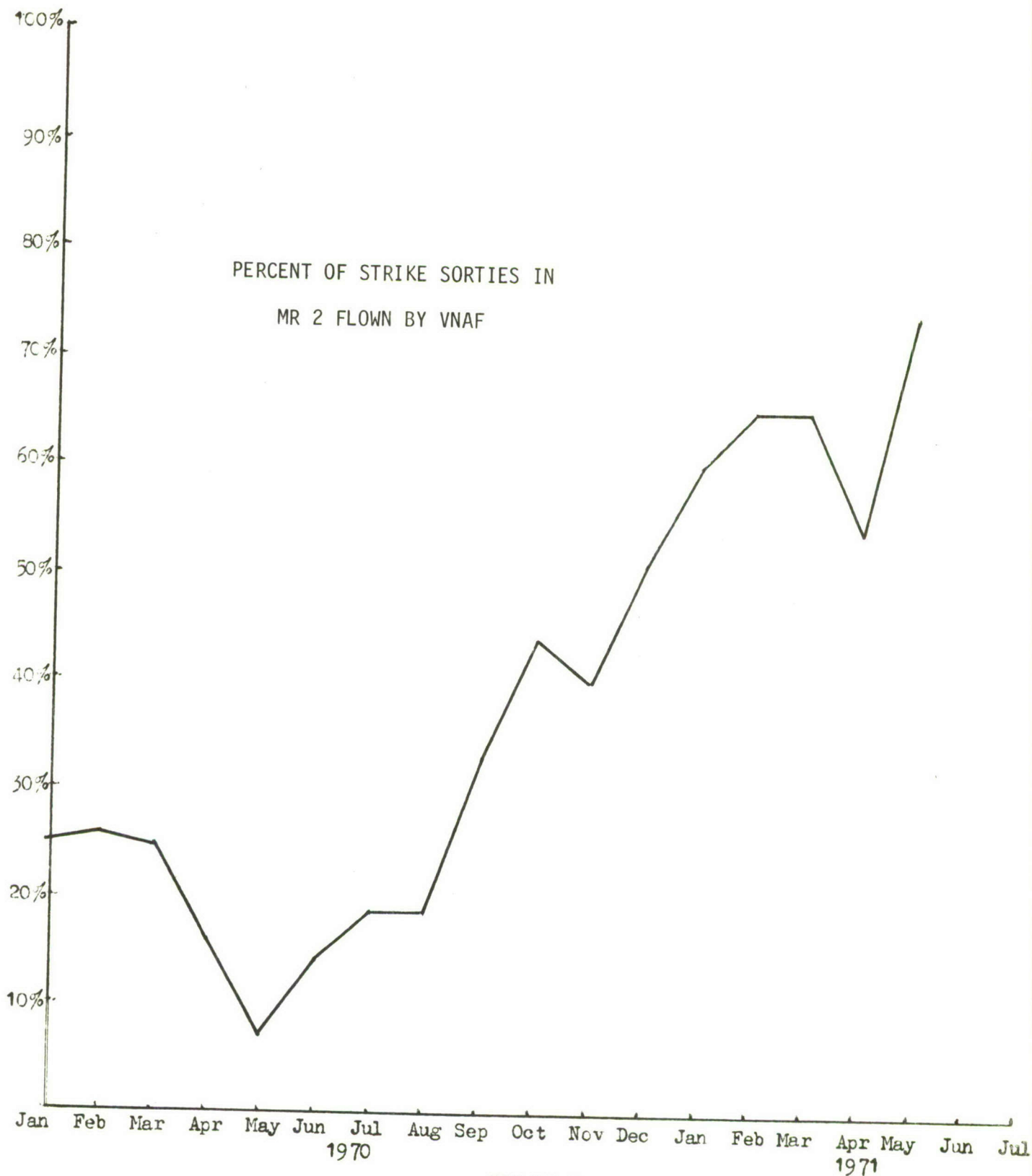


FIGURE 5  
43

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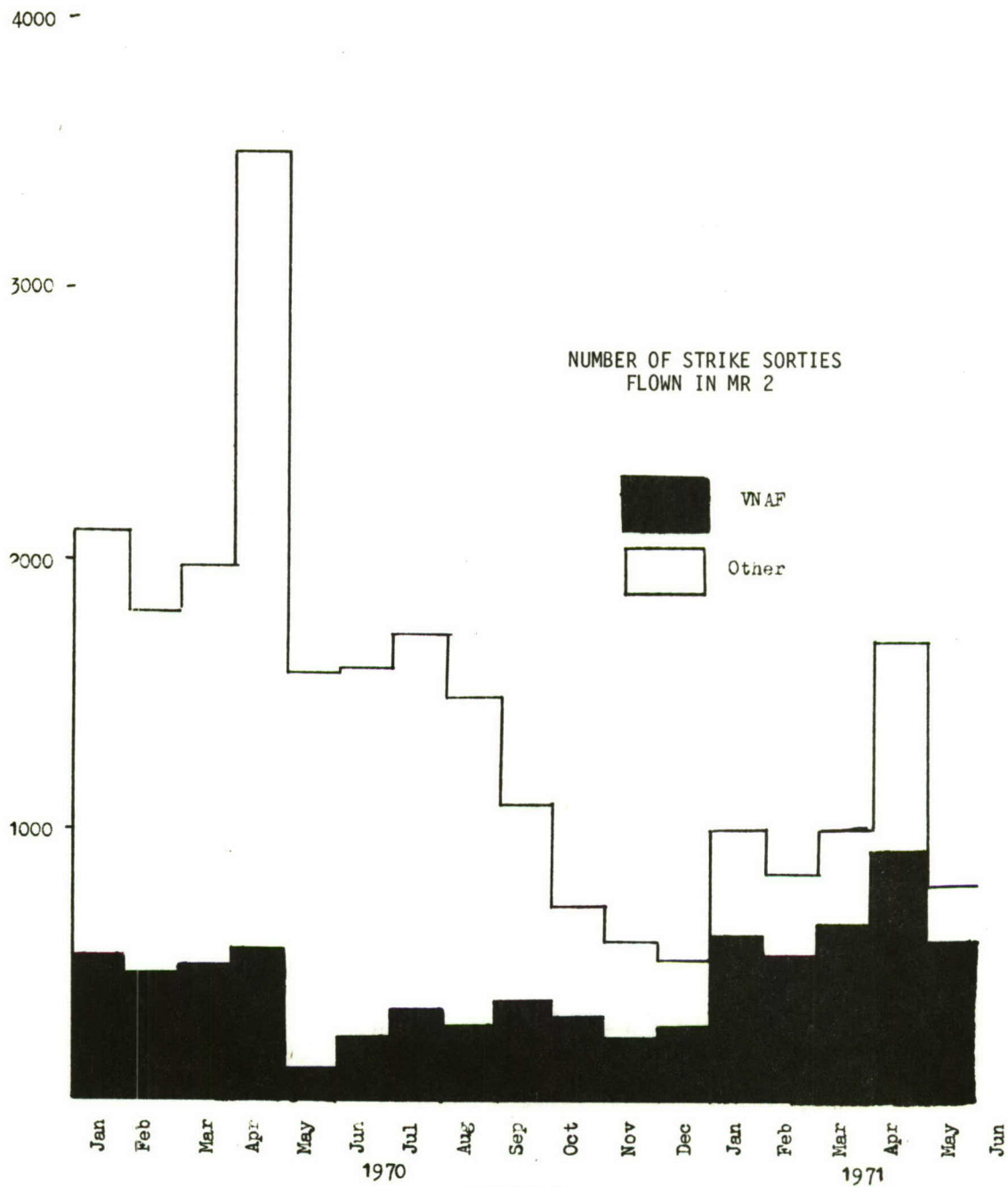


FIGURE 6

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impressive, but should be viewed in light of the overall decline in air activity in the region. This decline was due, certainly, to the reduction of USAF resources, but also to a lower level of ground activity as U.S. Army units were withdrawn from the field. In general, combat operations, both on the ground and in the air, were beginning to assume the scale that could be sustained by the RVNAF operating on their own.<sup>25/</sup>

### Fighters

The fighter capability of the 2d AD, while limited, was impressive in its effectiveness. The 524th Squadron was carrying the bulk of the activity, but the 530th at Pleiku was rapidly assuming its share of the load.

Both squadrons reflected the VNAF-wide effort to expand strike capability, particularly in night operations. The 524th was fully qualified in both "Night Owl" operations and Skyspot bombing.<sup>26/</sup> In the 530th Squadron, half of the operationally ready pilots were instrument qualified two months after the squadron itself became OR.<sup>27/</sup> Night and instrument flying were being practiced and Skyspot training was being conducted.

Due to their relatively limited fighter resources, the VNAF did not commit aircraft and crews to long periods of ground alert.

Instead, sortie aircraft were "cocked" early, the crews stood by in

\*See CHECO Report, The Vietnamization of the Air War, 1970 - 1971.

**SECRET**

the operations room for two or three hours, and then, if not scrambled, flew a preplanned or divert sortie. For all types of aircraft, since they knew from experience that the demand for air would exceed supply, the VNAF Direct Air Support Centers (DASCs) scheduled all sorties, not just the preplanned. <sup>28/</sup>

In MR 2 this system meant, in practice, that all available fighters were scheduled against interdiction targets the night before. On the next day, that particular "line" or sortie was more often than not diverted before take-off to handle a close air support target which had developed since the fragmentary operations order was issued. <sup>29/</sup>

The distinction made by the USAF in its record-keeping system between interdiction and close air support was apparently not shared by the VNAF. The statistical records reflect a predominance of interdiction missions, whereas discussion with VNAF fliers and their advisors in the field revealed that most sorties were actually flown in close air support. <sup>30/</sup> The same situation existed in liaison, with visual reconnaissance accounting for <sup>31/</sup> most logged sorties and FAC missions accounting for most flown ones. This general indifference to record-keeping pervaded the VNAF in standardization, maintenance, and operations.

### Helicopters

In MR 2, the newly activated helicopter squadrons were fast attaining the same reputation for aggressiveness and courage that the fighter squadrons had long enjoyed. By their performance in battle in support of Fire Support Bases (FSB) Five and Six in April through July of 1971, the 215th and 229th Squadrons gained self-confidence and respect.

[REDACTED]

On 1 April 1971, a combat assault was staged to retake FSB 6 which had been overrun the night before. An American airmobile advisor did not hesitate to state flatly that the VNAF helicopters landed ARVN troops despite an intensity of enemy fire which drove back American resupply aircraft.<sup>32/</sup> An American who was present recounted that in their combat support of FSB 5, the VNAF used tactics "that weren't in the book" to successfully reach the garrison when U.S. attempts had failed.<sup>33/</sup>

Problems remained, however, in the employment of helicopters in MR 2. The ARVN found it easier to ask for support directly from the U.S. Army than to use the VNAF system through the DASC. Some resolution of this problem would have to be reached to achieve Vietnamese self-sufficiency in helicopters with their small force. In his end-of-tour report, the Chief of the 2d AD Advisory Team during this period of transition warned that:<sup>34/</sup>

*One area which is weak in helicopter operations is prior planning on the part of supported units. . . . As U.S. Army assets decrease, we cannot afford missions which utilize excessive blade time or which result in assets waiting all day--just to be used for a few hours. Also, only by preplanning will we be able to preposture our assets in a timely manner. In a Military Region as large as ours, with its extremes in weather, preposturing is absolutely essential if we are to support an increased ARVN use with our limited number of aircraft. Soon there won't be enough assets to go around.*

Much of the necessary flexibility in the helicopter force was to come from a system of mobility based upon the existence of Forward Operating Locations (FOLs). These would be prepared "bare bases" where

[REDACTED]

the force could be deployed to support operations. Problems were being encountered in MR 2, however, with the preparation of the 2d AD's 11 FOLs. Support of the bases (except for Ban Me Thuot) was to come from the ARVN, but this support was not being attained a year after the program had begun. The 2d AD was finding it impossible to operate from some of these bases.<sup>35/</sup> Additionally, the TDY necessary in sustained forward operations imposed a large financial hardship. Funds were not available to pay per diem (the VNAF airman had to largely fend for himself), and there was the matter of the off-duty job left behind. The VNAF pay was such that this extra income was essential.

Another operational difficulty was the Medevac mission which was straining VNAF resources. The primary problem was limited aircraft. In 1970, the U.S. Army operated 48 Dustoff helicopters (whose only mission was Medevac) in MR 2--over half as many as the entire authorized strength of the 2d AD in mid-1971.

Navigation and instrument techniques were weaknesses in pilot skills which reduced the combat effectiveness of the 2d AD helicopter squadrons. To correct these deficiencies, an advisor from the U.S. Army had been assigned to the 215th at Nha Trang to develop and conduct an instrument school which was to "serve as a standard for instrument training in all VNAF Helicopter Squadrons."<sup>36/</sup>

### Tactical Air Control System

The most distinctive thing about the Tactical Air Control System (TACS) in MR 2 was its independence. The aircraft of the 62d and 72d Wings were utilized almost exclusively in MR 2 and the II DASC controlled them. "The DASC proposes a frag to TACC, and TACC informs the DASC of the daily commitment which most of the time is just what the DASC proposes."<sup>37/</sup> The TACC in Saigon really entered the picture actively when air strength had to be concentrated across MR boundaries. Examples of this in MR 2 were the deployment of three A-1s from Pleiku to Da Nang in July 1971, and the use of Pleiku's A-1s and UH-1s in out-country sorties. These missions were fragged by the TACC.

To accomplish its function in MR 2, the TACS had the organization depicted in Figure 7.<sup>38/</sup> Aircraft control for this system was provided by the two GCI sites at Pleiku and Ban Me Thuot under the command of the VNAF AC&W Group. (Location of the VNAF TACS elements is indicated on Figure 9).

The TACS in MR 2 suffered a number of weaknesses which appeared to have possible long-range consequences. The first was the relatively junior rank and inexperience of the Air Liaison Officers (ALOs). Until 1971, this problem certainly existed. By June of that year, however, corrective action was being taken. Four field grade pilots of the 524th Fighter Squadron had been selected for assignment as ALOs.<sup>39/</sup>

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The VNAF TACS in MR 2.

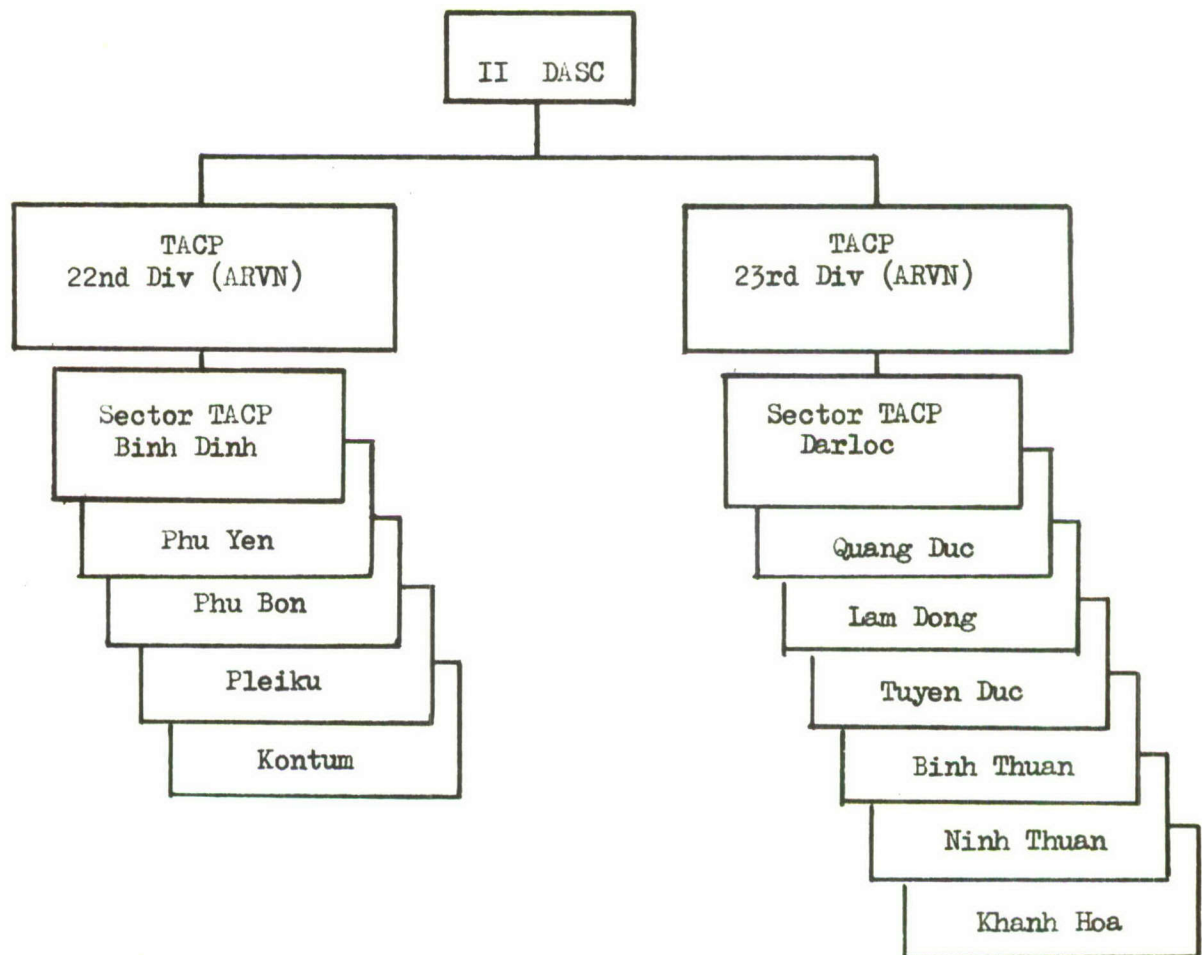


FIGURE 7

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In MR 2, this ALO situation gave rise to a practice which seemed ingrained and could persist. With the failure of the ALO system, ARVN commanders apparently passed their needs up through the Army chain to II Corps. Here they were collected and sorted by the ARVN and the great majority of VNAF frags came to II DASC directly from the II Corps commander, complete with priorities already attached and the permission of authorities obtained.<sup>40/</sup> As the ARVN gained real or imagined expertise in the employment of air power in their own support, it appeared at least possible that even experienced ALOs would find limited acceptance.

MR 2 contained 50 percent of South Vietnam's territory, yet had allocated to it the same liaison strength--two squadrons--as each of the other three regions. In the spring of 1971, when the VNAF flew well over half of the strike sorties in MR 2, half of this liaison strength did not yet exist; the 118th Squadron was only just activated and appeared to be encountering problems in its progress toward OR status.\* As an expedient, FACs were deployed as required by the situation, not dedicated to a particular area or ARVN unit. Even with all training complete, however, MR 2 would have a FAC density of only one-third that enjoyed by the rest of South Vietnam.

Inadequate communications at all levels of the MR 2 TACS was a potentially serious problem. Most of the radios allocated to the DASC and the TACPs were older battery powered models with limited range,

\*See the discussion under "Pleiku" above.

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VNAF UH-1 Huey Helicopter  
at a Forward Operating Location

FIGURE 8

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MILITARY REGION 2

TACS

Sector TACP - • Pleiku

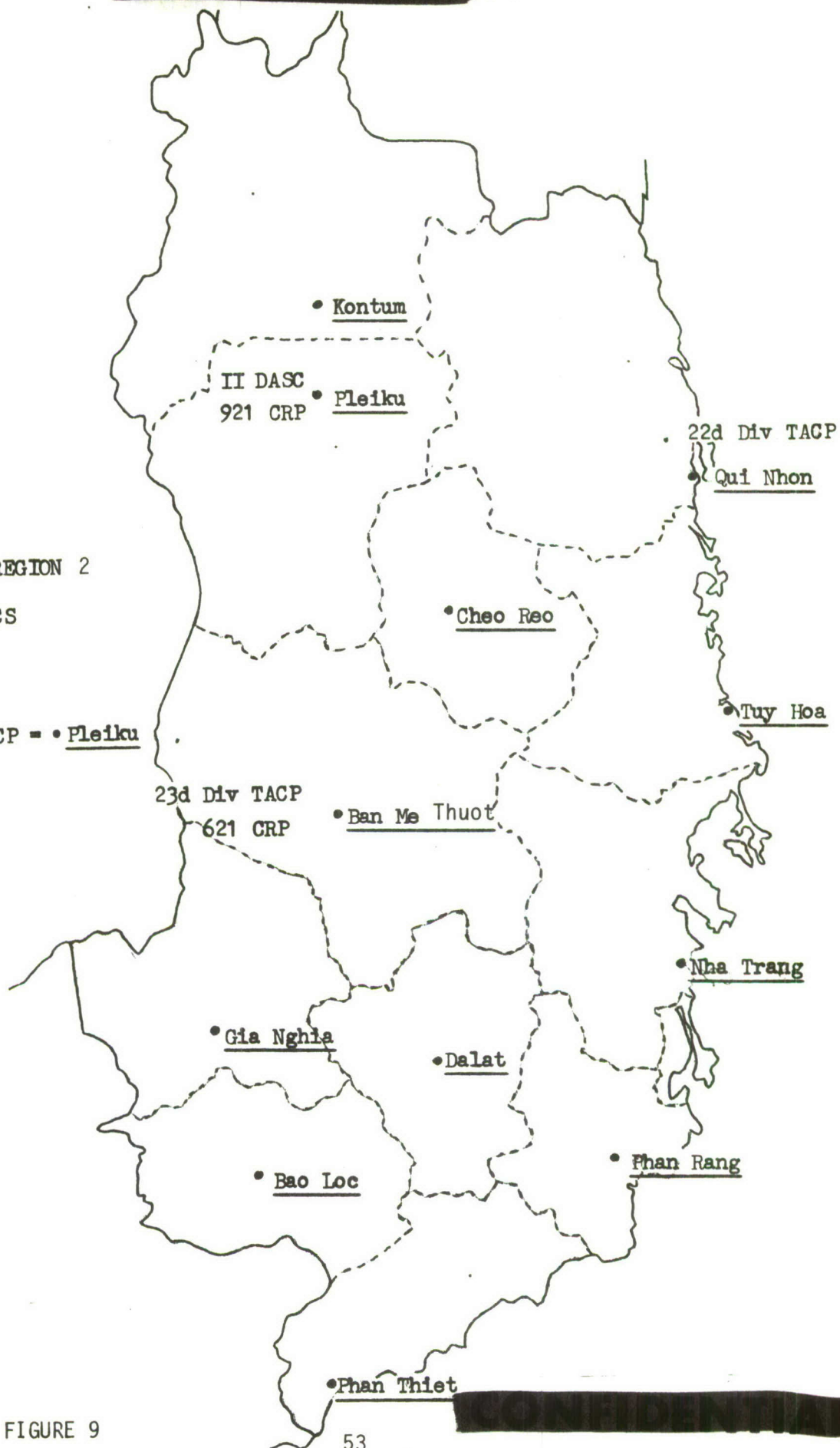


FIGURE 9

[REDACTED]

particularly in the mountainous terrain of MR 2.<sup>41/</sup> Shortage of spare parts, too few assigned frequencies, nonexistent or inadequate power sources, and limited ARVN ground support added to the ineffectiveness of the radio net.<sup>42/</sup> In order to get the job done, VNAF FACs and strike pilots had developed the procedure of using the GCI sites to relay air strike information.<sup>43/</sup>

### Materiel

The materiel effort was a pacing factor in Improvement and Modernization. In MR 2 materiel support was limited by technically inexperienced personnel and supply shortages.<sup>44/</sup>

Materiel shortages were evident within the 2d AD. Paper, for example, was in very short supply and caused a bottleneck in all administrative areas. The effect was not as great as it would have been on the USAF, but it may have explained some of the VNAF's lack of enthusiasm for collecting statistics. At Nha Trang, the internal information program for the whole Division was being adversely affected.<sup>45/</sup>

Vehicles of all types were another scarce item. Lack of special purpose vehicles was greatly hampering self-sufficiency in the civil engineering area. Such seemingly routine tasks as keeping the grass cut back from runways and the roads graded became a problem due to the lack of equipment.<sup>46/</sup>

[REDACTED]

The dual base arrangement in the Second Air Division had been responsible for some organizational modification in the materiel function. The Activation Plan for the Division had envisioned the heavy maintenance being performed for both tactical wings by the 2d Maintenance and Supply Wing based at Nha Trang with a detachment at Pleiku. Flight line maintenance was to be accomplished internally in each wing.<sup>47/</sup>

The geographical separation of the 72d Tactical Wing at Pleiku encouraged the evolution within its Technical Group of a field maintenance capability to handle moderate battle damage. This increased capacity allowed them to operate more or less independently of Nha Trang.<sup>48/</sup> At the same time, the Technical Group in the 62d Wing was decreased in importance as their role was gradually absorbed by the 2d Maintenance Wing. In other words, despite a drastically different organizational structure, in practice, the two wings were operating more and more along the lines of the USAF.

### Installations

At both bases in MR 2 the task of learning to run the installation was a formidable one for the VNAF. The civil engineering advisor at Pleiku summarized the problem facing them by pointing to the example of a five-ton air conditioning unit on the flight line. To support this, there were three VNAF airmen, all unskilled. His conclusion: "There ain't no way!"<sup>49/</sup>

In most cases, quantity of manpower was not the problem. The support organizations were usually reasonably well-manned and in some

[REDACTED]

cases overmanned. As in the other areas, however, the shortage was in trained personnel.

Facility transfers occupied much effort of both USAF advisors and their counterparts. Two factors slowed this process. As American units withdrew, it became increasingly difficult to get buildings up to the minimum condition required by agreement to be transferred to the VNAF. Security of the buildings was another problem. When large numbers of buildings were emptied, as at Nha Trang, it was a major task to guard them against pilferage (by both Americans and Vietnamese) until they could be occupied by the VNAF.<sup>50/</sup>

At both Nha Trang and Pleiku, the program to construct dependent housing was underway by mid-1971. The need for housing was acute in MR 2. At Pleiku, housing would do much to relieve the hardship of being stationed at that remote base. In Nha Trang, airmen often had to sleep in the backs of shops or offices because they had no other place to live.<sup>51/</sup>

The housing project was completely self-help from making bricks to the completion of construction. While critically necessary to alleviate what amounted to actual suffering on the part of the VNAF member and his family, the housing construction program was proving valuable in another sense. It provided relatively uncomplicated practice for the hundreds of OJT airmen in the civil engineering area.

Air base security was being provided by the Vietnamese completely at Nha Trang and for about half of Pleiku. (Like many other support

[REDACTED]

functions, this was dependent upon the drawdown of U.S. forces. Pleiku was still a joint-use base.) Nha Trang illustrated some of the problems in this area. The VNAF were responsible for perimeter and internal security while the ARVN patrolled the surrounding area. Being located in a city, Nha Trang did not have a clear field of fire around it. Its defense plan had to be based on an ability to react within the base confines. Once again, shortage of equipment severely limited effectiveness. There were, for example, very few fixed perimeter lights. Many of the guard posts were old and ill-positioned French bunkers. The vehicles needed for mobility were not available. As the security advisor at Nha Trang said, it did little good for him to teach the VNAF about fast reaction teams when their only transport was bicycles and motorcycles.<sup>52/</sup>

### Conclusion

The 2d AD, like the entire VNAF, was growing in numbers and increasing in mission effectiveness. Time was required to absorb the equipment provided by CRIMP. Time was also needed to gain the experience required by newly trained VNAF officers and airmen. The drawdown of USAF forces in MR 2 and throughout South Vietnam had to be carefully managed to assure that the VNAF was continually encouraged to assume increased responsibility for the air war consistent with their improved capability and mounting level of experience.

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19. (U) Interview, topic: Operations. With Maj Gilbert L. Berry, 235th Helicopter Squadron Commander Advisor, AFAT-2-2, by Maj Wayne C. Pittman, Jr., at Pleiku AB, 14 June 1971.
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### CHAPTER III

#### THE THIRD AIR DIVISION

This chapter is a summary of the Third Air Division's role in the Consolidated Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces Improvement and Modernization Program (CRIMP). Specifically, it covers the period since the Division's activation on 1 May 1970, concentrating on the activation of its four helicopter squadrons and the Division's operations in Cambodia. Both fighter and helicopter operations will be covered, with emphasis on the maintenance function.

Military Region 3 (MR 3) included the 10 provinces immediately surrounding the Capital Special Zone, which in turn encompassed Saigon. (See Figure 1.) The operations launched in May 1970 to destroy the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and Viet Cong (VC) sanctuaries in Cambodia originated from this region.<sup>1/</sup> Lying between the Mekong Delta and the Central Highlands, MR 3 has both flat grassy areas and mountainous wooded districts.

The Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) Third Air Division (3d AD) Headquarters was at Bien Hoa Air Base (AB). In addition to Bien Hoa, the 3d AD had seven Forward Operating Locations (FOLs) operated and maintained by the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). They were located at Song Be, Quan Loi, Tay Ninh, Lai Khe, Xuan Loc, Cu Chi, and Vung Tau.<sup>2/</sup> Operating in MR 3 were the ARVN 5th Division headquartered at Lai Khe, the 18th Division at Xuan Loc, and the 24th Division Cu Chi.<sup>3/</sup>

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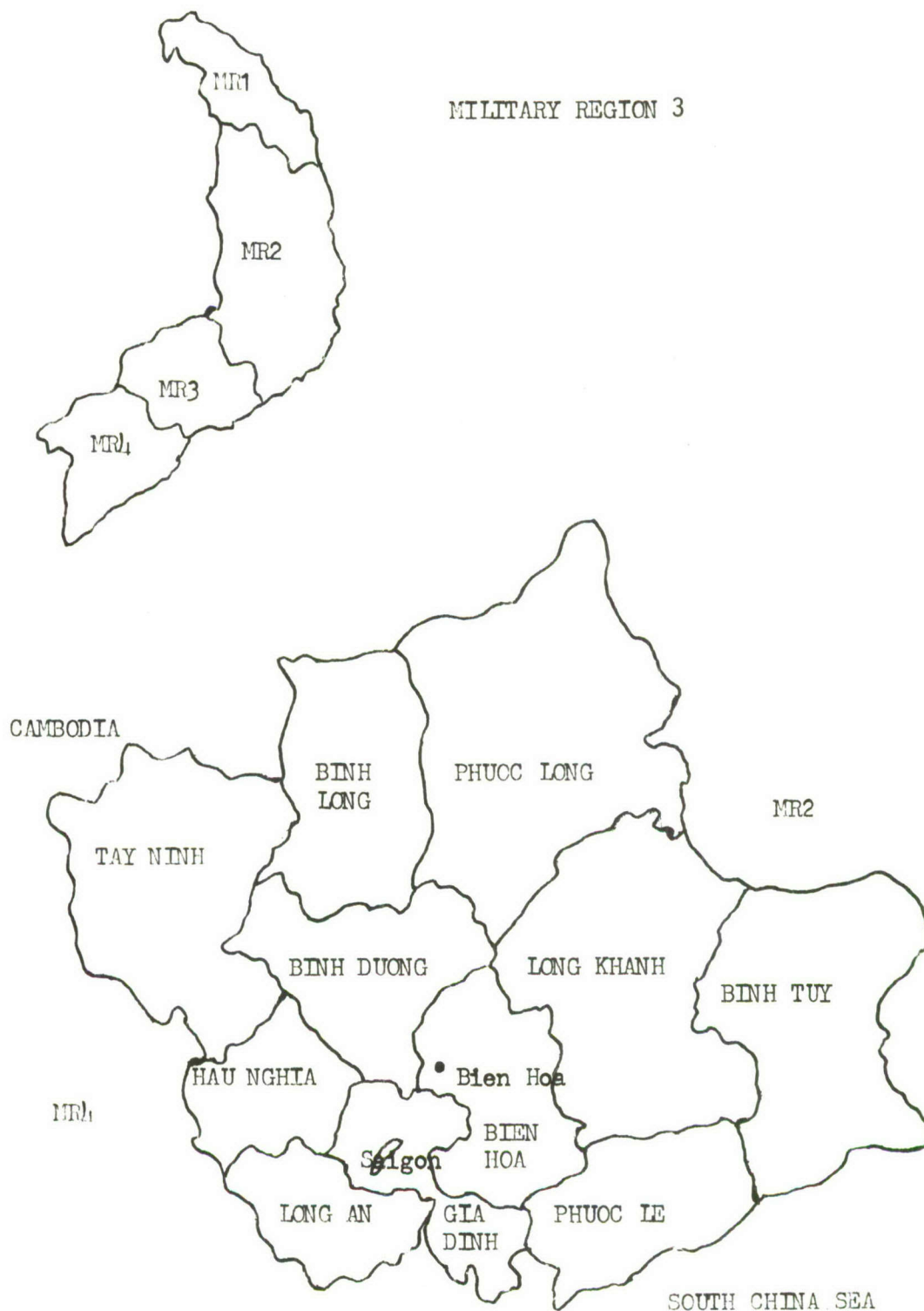


Figure 1

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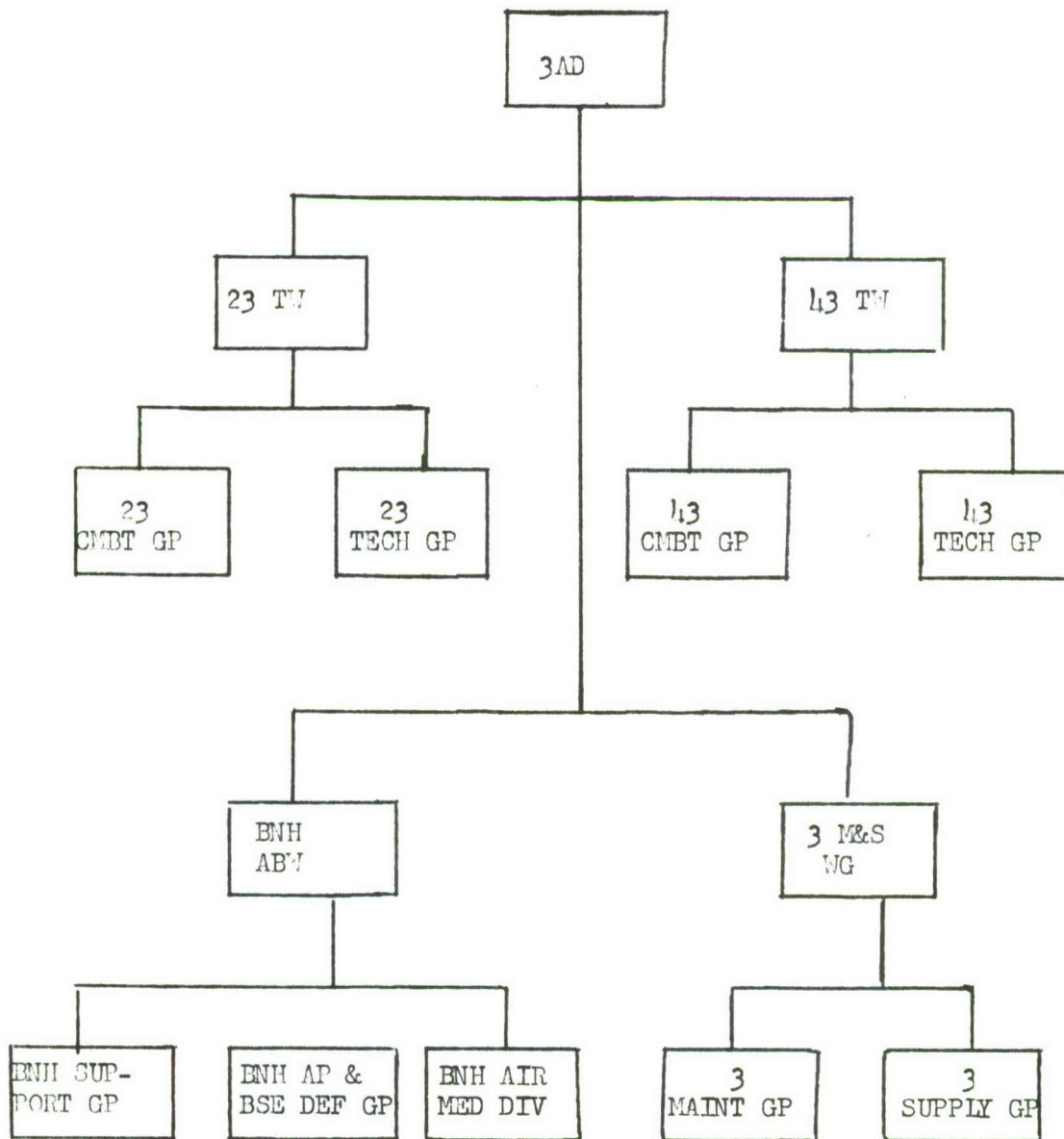
Assigned units of the 3d AD included the 23d Tactical Wing (TW) the 43d TW, the Bien Hoa Air Base Wing (ABW), and the 3d Maintenance and Supply (M & S) Wing. (See Figure 2.) The units and aircraft of the 23d TW included the 514th Tactical Fighter Squadron (TFS) with 23 A-1s, the 518th TFS with 18 A-1s, the 522d TFS with 20 F-5s and 6 RF-5s, and the 112th Liaison Squadron (LS) with 30 O-1s and 10 U-17s. The 43d TW had the 221st, 223d, and 231st Helicopters Squadrons (HSs) with 31 UH-1Hs each and the 237th HS, which had 16 CH-47s.<sup>4/</sup> (See Figure 3.)

#### Chronology of Unit Activations

On 1 May 1970, the 3d AD became the second VNAF air division to be activated.<sup>5/</sup> Upon activation, the 3d AD took command of the existing 23d TW, which at that time included the 514th TFS with its 24 A-1s, the 518th TFS with its 18 A-1s, the 422d TFS with its 18 F-5s and 2 RF-5s, and the 112th LS with its 20 O-1s and 10 U-17s. Newly-activated subordinate units included the 23d Combat Group (which was composed of the fighter and liaison squadrons) and the 23d Technical Group.<sup>6/</sup>

A month later on 1 June 1970, the Bien Hoa ABW, the 3d M & S Wing, and the 43d TW were activated.<sup>7/</sup> When activated, the 43d TW had only the 43d Technical Group with its 43d Flight Line, Armament, and Periodic Maintenance Squadrons, but no Flight Line, Weapons Loading, or Weapons Maintenance Detachments; these were to be activated with their respective squadrons.<sup>8/</sup> (See Figure 4.) The 43d Combat Group had no helicopters yet. The 3d AD's first UH-1H "Huey" helicopters were

3d AIR DIVISION ORGANIZATION



Source: VNAF PP 70-2 pp. 4-6

Figure 2

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THIRD AIR DIVISION

AIRCRAFT

(July 1971)

23d Tactical Wing

514th TFS 24 A-1s

518th TFS 24 A-1s

522d TFS 20 F-5s

6 RF-5s

112th LS 30 O-1s

8 U-17s

536th TFS (to be activated Oct 72 with 24 A-37s)

124th LS (to be activated Dec 72 with 25 O-1s & U-7s)

43d Tactical Wing

221st HS 31 UH-1Hs

223d HS 31 UH-1Hs

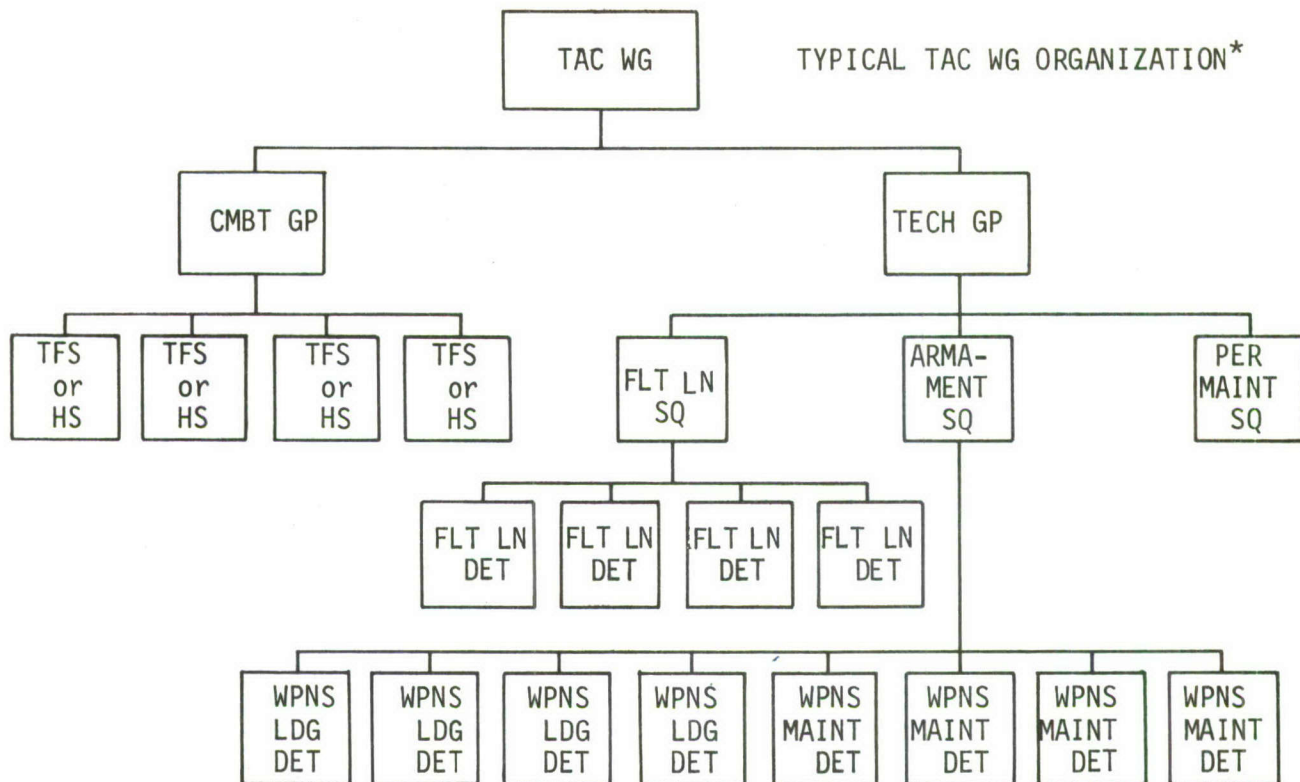
231st HS 31 UH-1Hs

237th HS 16 CH-47s

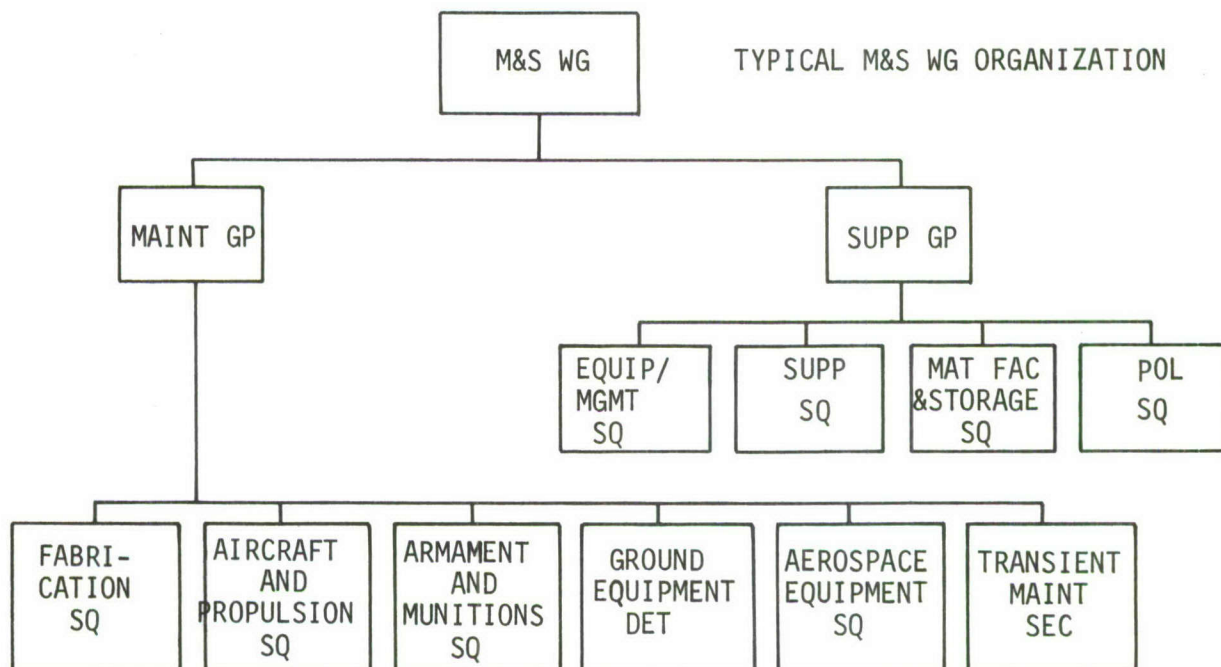
245th HS (to be activated Dec 71 with 31 UH-1Hs)

FIGURE 3

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\* CH-47 SQ had no WPNS LDG, WPNS MAINT DETS



SOURCE: VNAF PP 70-2, pp. 4-6

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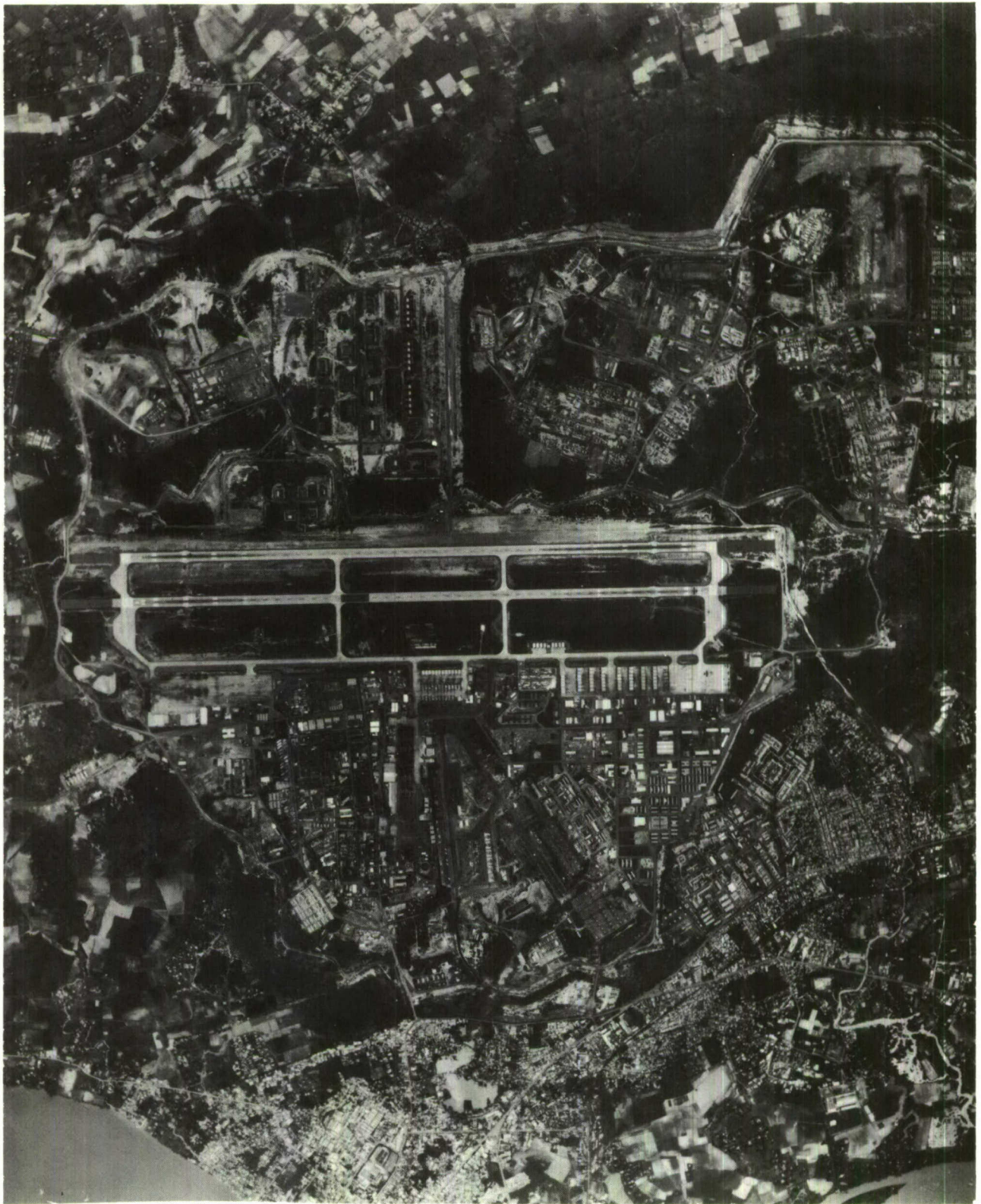
assigned on 1 September 1970 when the 223d HS was activated, along with the associated 223d Flight Line, Weapons Loading, and Weapons Maintenance Detachments which actually came under the control of the 43d Technical Group.<sup>9/</sup>

On 30 September 1970, the 237th HS (the first VNAF CH-47 "Chinook" squadron) and 237th Flight Line Detachment were activated five months ahead of schedule. The 221st HS and its associated 221st Flight Line, Weapons Loading, and Weapons Maintenance Detachments were activated on 2 January 1971, and the 231st HS with its three detachments on 1 March 1971.<sup>10/</sup> At the time of this report, the U.S. Army's 240th Assault Helicopter Company (AHC) at Bear Cat was programmed to train the VNAF at Bien Hoa to activate the 245th HS by 31 December 1971, three months ahead of schedule.<sup>11/</sup> Also, the 536th TFS was programmed to be activated in October 1972 with 24 A-37s and the 124th LS in December 1972 with 25 O-1s and 7 U-17s. Activation of the F-5E air defense squadron was planned for FY 74.<sup>12/</sup>

#### Facilities Turnover

Bien Hoa AB was a joint USAF/VNAF air base 15 miles north of Saigon. It had two east-west 10,000-foot concrete runways, a parallel taxiway, and concrete and asphalt aprons with both open and closed aircraft revetments.<sup>13/</sup> (See Figure 5.) The original air base and facilities at Bien Hoa were built by the French, who activated a depot there on 1 June 1955, and those facilities on the west side of the original French north-south runway belonged to the VNAF in 1971.<sup>14/</sup> Moreover, the

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BIEN HOA AB, A JOINT USAF/VNAF AB

FIGURE 5

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heliport and facilities formerly occupied by the U.S. Army's 145th Combat Aviation Battalion had been transferred to the VNAF.<sup>15/</sup> Most of the east side of the base was still occupied by the USAF, but some of the buildings had been turned over to the VNAF.

In April 1971, the Heliport Control Tower was transferred to the VNAF, and in June, the TACAN and weather facilities were both transferred in Category A Status and the Dial Central Office and its associated cable distribution plant in Category B Status.\* Transfer of the Bien Hoa Control Tower was accelerated by one year when the VNAF took over in July.<sup>16/</sup>

The VNAF Base Defense Group took over responsibility for guarding the entire base perimeter (excluding the USAF bomb dump area) on 1 June 1970, and at the direction of VNAF Headquarters, developed their own Base Defense Plan (equivalent to a USAF Operations Plan).<sup>17/</sup>

Another area of responsibility assumed by the VNAF was base-wide fire protection when they took over the fire department buildings and associated firefighting equipment and vehicles. The Petroleum, Oil, and Lubricants (POL) Laboratory was transferred on 7 November 1970, and the Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) facilities, tools, and equipment on 31 October 1970.<sup>18/</sup> Also, more than 30 pieces of emergency equipment

\* Category A meant that these facilities were U.S. owned and would be removed when the USAF moved out. Category B meant that the facilities were solely used and owned by the VNAF.

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were turned over to the VNAF when 12 Vietnamese airmen and NCOs completed OJT and classroom training and took over the crash recovery mission.<sup>19/</sup>

As part of a 450-unit family housing project, the VNAF built a block-making machine to produce small manageable cinder blocks. By mid-1971, five units were complete and 11 foundations were prepared.<sup>20/</sup>

As the USAF continued to withdraw its personnel, needed facilities were being turned over to the VNAF.

### Training

According to the VNAF Programming Plan 70-2, flying training to upgrade aircrews to fill required positions had priority in newly activated units.<sup>21/</sup> However, the heavy commitments to support ARVN operations in Cambodia caused flying training in the newly-activated 223d HS to be subordinated to combat operations. The squadron was able to train only 32 pilots before activation. In comparison, the 221st HS activated on 1 January 1971, and trained 98 pilots by mid-1971. The 231st HS trained 39 pilots and was still training gunship pilots. The 237th HS, with the aid of the U.S. Army's 205th Assault Support Helicopter Company (ASHC), had trained 39 pilots for its 16 Chinooks.<sup>22/</sup>

Phase I and Phase II training was conducted by the U.S. Army helicopter companies from which the VNAF helicopters came. This training took place during the 90 days before activation while Phase III training was done in the new VNAF unit after activation. Phase I included standardization and first pilot training. Phase II was Army helicopter flight crew

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training. Phase III was unit flying. U.S. Army personnel continued training the Vietnamese for three months after activation, and after the U.S. Army helicopter companies rotated, only operations and maintenance advisors were left under operational control of the Air Force Advisory Team (AFAT) Chief.<sup>23/</sup>

A Mobile Training Team (MTT) of 29 personnel provided follow-on training for CH 47 maintenance and trained over 150 Vietnamese in a five-month period ending 25 February 1971. In addition, a 30-man USAF augmentation team arrived three days later to provide supplemental maintenance and help in training.<sup>24/</sup>

The 43d TW also trained in two other helicopter operations--pathfinder and medevac. An 18-man Pathfinder Force of three 6-man teams was trained and equipped and became operationally ready on 1 March 1971. These small teams were airlanded by helicopter at AFVN assembly areas to coordinate on-loading of troops for air assaults into unfriendly territory. With the aid of the U.S. Army Dustoff unit at Long Binh, a medical evacuation training program was started in May 1971.<sup>25/</sup> Although flying training was decreased, 33 wingmen and 14 flight leads were combat-ready trained, replacing experienced VNAF pilots transferred to new squadrons.<sup>26/</sup> This dilution of experience was a serious problem, but unavoidable.

In the reconnaissance program, RF-5 camera maintenance and operations personnel successfully completed training programs conducted by two MTTs on 15 October 1970, giving the VNAF its first fighter reconnaissance

[REDACTED]

capability to provide air targeting and ARVN ground operations support.<sup>27/</sup>

Taught by an all VNAF instructor force, the 3d AD Technical School graduated 475 airmen in 14 AFSCs. The Technical School of the Air Base Wing, another all VNAF school, graduated 2,733 basic trainees, 160 base defense personnel, 626 airmen/noncommissioned officers, and 370 direct-civilian input noncommissioned officers.<sup>28/</sup>

Phase II Officer training began for the first time at Bien Hoa on 12 April 1971 for 56 pilots.<sup>29/</sup> This continuing program by the VNAF gave U.S.-trained officer candidates six months of officer training, ending in a commission as a second lieutenant.

The Bien Hoa Technical School:<sup>30/</sup>

*. . . supported by the Third Air Division and ALC, but directly under VNAF Headquarters Training Directorate, graduated 726 students in four airman basic residency course in propeller, fuel cell repair, reciprocating engine and jet engine. The school, initially assisted by a four unit USAF Mobile Training Team, became a totally independent operation as of 31 December 1970. The students graduated from these courses are on a par with basic technical school students produced in the United States.*

Developed by the Third Air Division DCS/T with assistance from the AFAT-3 training advisors, a 3 to 5 level upgrade OJT program for 39 students was started on 17 February 1971, with an additional class of 103 started on 21 April 1971.<sup>31/</sup>

[REDACTED]

Supervised and taught by USAF advisors, the English Language Night School for Vietnamese military personnel, civil servants, and high school students improved during 1970-71, and the average level of language proficiency of students completing the course increased to that of a 16-year-old American. Attendance increased from less than 100 to 258 students.<sup>32/</sup> English classes were also conducted at the VNAF Dispensary and Transportation Squadron Charge of Quarters Office. The advisors taught 14 senior VNAF NCOs basic English. Since communication was basic to the success of the I&M program, these language courses made a significant contribution toward that goal.

### Operations

#### 23d Tactical Wing

Combat operations, sustained and effectively coordinated, are the true measure of the VNAF's self-sufficiency. The 23d TW successfully passed the test.<sup>33/</sup>

*On two occasions, the wing was required to plan for and conduct extensive, sustained air support for offensive drives in Cambodia. The first drive opened Route 7 from Phnom Penh to Kompong Cham. For two weeks, the 23d Tactical Wing provided close air support and relieved numerous "Troops-in-Contact" situations. A similar operation supported the ARVN in sweeping Route 4 from Phnom Penh to Kampong Som. Both operations required a maximum effort by the 23d Wing. Under the leadership of the Third Air Division Commander, the VNAF completed all planning, managed their resources very effectively, and satisfied all requirements.*

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Although the 23d TW was allotted only 85 percent of its total flying hours to operational missions, extremely heavy strike commitments in Cambodia gave first priority to operational sorties, which averaged 103 <sup>34/</sup> per day.

23d TW FLYING HOURS

|                                | <u>A-1</u> | <u>F-5</u> | <u>O-1</u> | <u>U-17</u> |
|--------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| Total Hours Programmed         | 23,400     | 7,805      | 18,270     | 5,200       |
| Operational Sortie Hours Flown | 20,319     | 6,705      | 19,944     | 4,581       |
| Percentage                     | 87%        | 86%        | 109%       | 88%         |

In support of the Cambodian operations, six A-1s were deployed to Binh Thuy AB for strikes into southern Cambodia, and one U-17 to Phnom <sup>35/</sup> Penh and one O-1 to Kompong Cham for liaison work.

At the insistence of the Air Force Advisory Group (AFGP) the VNAF began F-5 air defense training in basic Air Combat Maneuvers (ACM), and air-to-air dart\* firing, with AIM-9 missile practice scheduled for the summer of 1971. The 23d Technical Group provided the entire dart system training, including assembly tow techniques and gun cameras. The system

\* A dart is a target towed several thousand feet behind an aircraft and used by another aircraft for gunnery practice.

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is "... now operational and presents a first-time capability within the VNAF."<sup>36/</sup> However, as the primary air defense weapons system armed with guns and AIM-9 missiles, the F-5 was a doubtful deterrent against MIG 19s and MIG 21s.

The first RF-5 aircraft arrived in July 1970.<sup>37/</sup> With all planning, training, and development of tactics accomplished, the 522d Squadron became operationally ready in the reconnaissance mission on 1 November 1970.<sup>38/</sup> However, this system was limited to day VFR missions, as it had no Infrared, Photo Flash, or Side-Looking Radar (SLAR).

Becoming operationally ready four months early, a VNAF Photo Exploitation Center (PEC) was established and collocated with the 12th Reconnaissance Intelligence Technical Squadron at Tan Son Nhut Airfield on 2 May 1970.<sup>39/</sup> It provided the necessary support for the reconnaissance program.

Since the enemy was most active at night, the AFGP urged the VNAF to develop a night bombing capability.<sup>40/</sup> At Bien Hoa, the VNAF agreed to night training with two A-1 sorties nightly for night proficiency and three a week for bombing practice with the advisors flying A-1 flareship support. Because of its air defense commitment, the F-5s were not tasked with night flying training. VNAF Headquarters called for A-1 flight leads to be qualified in SKY SPOT\* bombing. USAF advisors "... checked out

\* System by which ground radars direct bombing.

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30 percent of the flight leads by October 1970 . . . and 50 percent of them are now qualified."<sup>41/</sup> However, after the A-1 advisors returned to the United States, the A-1 flaeship, night bombing, and SKY SPOT training missions stopped, even though most of the VNAF pilots at Bien Hoa were qualified for night missions.<sup>42/</sup> The Vietnamese pilots did not like to fly at night or in weather and they did not feel it was necessary. Aircraft attitude gyros, heading indicators, TACANs, and radios were generally unreliable because these discrepancies were not always recorded or repaired,<sup>43/</sup> the pilots lacked confidence and experience in instrument flying. A three-man Mobile Training Team (MTT) was to arrive on 1 October 1971 to set up an Instructor Pilot Instrument School (IPIS) for fixed-wing and helicopter instrument training.<sup>44/</sup> Informally, the USAF Air Liaison Officer (ALO) to the ARVN Airborne Division in the Capital Military District was already helping the VNAF pilots set up a school in instrument flying techniques.

#### 43d Tactical Wing

Under the VNAF Programming Plan 70-51 of 7 April 1970, four helicopter squadrons were activated at Bien Hoa. The following table shows the squadrons' numbers, their U.S. Army training units, and activation dates:<sup>45/</sup>

| <u>VNAF Squadron</u> | <u>U.S. Army Unit</u> | <u>Activation Date</u> |
|----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 223d HS              | 190th AHC             | 1 September 1970       |
| 237th HS             | 205th ASHC            | 30 September 1970      |
| 221st HS             | 68th AHC              | 1 January 1971         |
| 231st HS             | 118th AHC             | 1 March 1971           |

Each squadron was flying combat missions within a month of activation.<sup>46/</sup>

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The United States Army had based helicopters at the FOLs and flown missions from there. However, because the VNAF had fewer helicopters and could not maintain and protect them at the FOLs, the helicopters were all flown back to Bien Hoa each evening.<sup>47/</sup> In addition, the crews lived in Saigon or Bien Hoa and did not receive per diem, rations, or quarters in the field.

Originally, VNAF helicopter squadrons were to activate with 80 percent of the authorized personnel strength, but in fact they ". . . activated with approximately 70 percent."<sup>48/</sup> The following table depicts the hours and sorties flown by each of the helicopter squadrons; the first figure is hours and the second is sorties:<sup>49/</sup>

Helicopter Squadron Flying Hours and Sorties

| <u>Squadron</u> | <u>Operations</u>  | <u>Other</u>   | <u>Training</u>  | <u>Test</u>    | <u>Total</u>       |
|-----------------|--------------------|----------------|------------------|----------------|--------------------|
| 223d            | 10,741.3<br>21,397 | 999.6<br>1,631 | 1,112.6<br>1,025 | 660.2<br>834   | 13,513.7<br>24,887 |
| 221st           | 1,532.8<br>1,014   | 477.8<br>367   | 1,674.2<br>1,447 | 469.0<br>517   | 3,731.7<br>3,345   |
| 231st           | 19.3<br>4          | 42.3<br>28     | 2,059.0<br>1,195 | 1,096.0<br>128 | 2,230.2<br>1,355   |
| 237th           | 3,270.7<br>6,568   | 127.5<br>152   | 940.9<br>2,143   | 368.5<br>635   | 4,707.6<br>9,498   |

The 223d HS was the VNAF's first UH-1H squadron. Shortly after activation in September 1970, it began flying operational missions and was flying 11 operational missions daily by the end of the year. Although

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these operational missions degraded the planned training program, the squadron was declared operationally ready on 15 January 1971, 2 1/2 months ahead of schedule.<sup>50/</sup>

This squadron participated in two large-scale combat missions in Cambodia during this period. On 7 December 1970, they flew 15 aircraft in support of ARVN and Cambodian Forces in a successful operation against the opposing enemy forces. Again on 17 January 1971 they flew 23 aircraft in support of an attempt to extract POWs from enemy territory.<sup>51/</sup> Nevertheless, "The 223d Squadron was fragged for operational missions prematurely which adversely affected their ability to conduct a training program."<sup>52/</sup>

The VNAF's first CH-47 "Chinook" helicopter squadron was the 237th, activated at Phu Loi.<sup>53/</sup>

*The squadron conducted training in conjunction with flying in-country operations missions and on 8 December 1970, they supported three fragged missions daily, both across the border and in-country. During the period 14-19 December 1970, this squadron was fragged for four to seven aircraft daily in support of a large scale military operation across the border.*

When the squadron moved to Bien Hoa on 4 January 1971, two combat missions were flown during the move. Within a week, full operations were resumed.<sup>54/</sup> The squadron became operationally ready on 1 June 1971.<sup>55/</sup>

The 221st HS was activated at Bien Hoa on 2 January 1971 with the aircraft acceptance inspection done at Phu Loi. The transfer of aircraft

[REDACTED]

went smoothly and close cooperation between the VNAF, USAF, and U.S. Army personnel was maintained so that there were no delays attributable to personnel shortage.<sup>56/</sup> The 231st HS was activated on 1 March 1971.

To support the helicopter squadrons, the VNAF, in October 1970, formed two aircraft recovery teams. The value of these teams was demonstrated the last two weeks of December 1970 during operations in Cambodia. American advisors were restricted from crossing the border. During this two-week period, extensive battle damage was experienced, and the team averaged one UH-1H recovery a day using only VNAF CH-47s. Most of these recoveries were made from hostile territory. On 20 December 1970, Chinook 086 was shot down in Cambodia while attempting to recover a Huey. The South Vietnamese quickly set up a perimeter and secured the area until the Chinook was repaired by a VNAF maintenance team. It was then flown safely back to Phu Loi. This is but one example of the high degree of professionalism developed by the VNAF recovery teams and maintenance personnel.<sup>57/</sup>

#### Tactical Air Control System

The MR 3 Direct Air Support Center (DASC) was formally turned over to VNAF control on 31 July 1971.<sup>58/</sup> By that time, the USAF had only one squadron of fighters (A-37s) assigned in MR 3, and its portion of the flight following board at the III DASC combat operations center was reduced to a single panel at the extreme left side.<sup>59/</sup>

[REDACTED]

Due to various considerations, the 3d AD kept most of its liaison aircraft at Bien Hoa.<sup>60/</sup> The FACs lived in Saigon or Bien Hoa and returned to their families each day. They were not paid per diem when they were away from Bien Hoa, and the FOLs did not have quarters or messing facilities for them. The 112th Liaison Squadron did keep one O-1 each at Tay Ninh and An Loc to direct operations in Cambodia. Each O-1 was periodically rotated to Bien Hoa for servicing and maintenance. Because of the flying time involved to get out to the FOLs, much effective mission flying time was wasted.

As in the other VNAF Air Divisions, most of the ALOs in 3d AD were junior officers with limited experience in 1970. But by mid-1971, this weakness had been recognized and corrective measures were being taken. Experienced majors and captains were being identified for assignments as ALOs.

#### Materiel

With the activation of the 43d Tactical Wing, the number of aircraft assigned to the Third Air Division increased from 97 to over 200.<sup>61/</sup> This tremendous increase led to a more effective fighting force, but it also represented a quantum jump in materiel support requirements.

With the increase in aircraft, the 3d Maintenance Group was expanded to 25 shops. The new jet engine shop for the first time in the VNAF now performed complete Jet Engine Field Maintenance (JEFM) on the

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Huey engines. The newly-built hydraulic shop test stand was in operation and the propeller and rotor shop was doing field level repair on propellers and would soon do the same work on the main and tail rotors of the Huey and Chinook helicopters. The Maintenance Group serviced the M-60 and XM-93 miniguns as well as 2.75 rocket pods. The fabrication squadron repair capability increased approximately 20 percent with the acquisition of additional shop space and equipment.<sup>62/</sup>

On the organizational maintenance level, the VNAF personnel in the 43d Technical Group were doing 95 percent of the required engine maintenance. USAF augmentation in the engine shop had been reduced by more than 20 percent.<sup>63/</sup> As for maintenance control, VNAF personnel designed and constructed status boards and rebuilt the control room as well. Scheduling was done daily by tail numbers, allowing an even flow of aircraft into the periodic inspection docks.<sup>64/</sup>

In the armament section, VNAF personnel were doing 95 percent of all weapons maintenance and loading; therefore, USAF augmentees were reduced from nine to six personnel.<sup>65/</sup>

#### Maintenance Problems

The major problem in maintenance as well as in other areas in mid-1971 was in standardization.<sup>66/</sup>

*This lack of standardization stems from a lack of basic discipline which seems to prevail*

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*throughout the entire VNAF and threatens the safety and well-being of every man in it. The lack of checklists is painfully apparent everywhere. The pilot refuses to use one, the armament crew doesn't have one, and the maintenance man doesn't know how to read one.*

Little had been done to strengthen the Standardization and Evaluation Program. The VNAF felt they didn't have a problem because VNAF Headquarters had not identified it as a weak area. <sup>67/</sup>

Failure to use Technical Orders (TOs) was a continuing problem. <sup>68/</sup>

*There is a great reluctance, even dread, on the part of 23d Technical Group and M & S Group personnel at all levels in the use of TOs. Because of their limited proficiency in English comprehension, they do not refer to TOs. Possibly the fear of failure or ridicule causes them to rely on common sense or previously memorized methods rather than new and more precise procedures in the TOs for their information. The result is shoddy maintenance, limited knowledge of systems and trouble-shooting procedures and a disregard for orderly maintenance of equipment.*

Aircraft discrepancies were not always written up, nor were discrepancies always followed up. Cannibalization was excessive, but more importantly, it was not controlled by management. At times, a mechanic would remove parts from a serviceable aircraft to repair a disabled one. No entries were made in the aircraft forms because the action was unauthorized. <sup>69/</sup> The only way to effectively correct this problem was for VNAF Headquarters to set a strong policy of maintenance discipline in an environment of limited resources. <sup>70/</sup>

### Supply Problems

The crux of the supply problem was that the Due In for Maintenance (DIFM) trade-in policy was simply not working.<sup>71/</sup> The parts were moving in only one direction--to the user. Defective parts were kept instead of being turned in for repair, but the new or replacement part was still being issued. If replacement parts were not issued, the mission would be affected. On the other hand, parts (both serviceable and non-serviceable) would be stocked up and hidden for future use. The users had no confidence in the supply system.<sup>72/</sup> The VNAF procedure was as follows:<sup>73/</sup>

*. . . the USAF advisor is approached first. If the advisor doesn't get the part, he goes to his supervisor, who goes across to his VNAF counterpart to correct the problem. If there are no results, the next higher level is tried, and so on. The U.S. advisor as middleman is usually there to supply everything, and it is a convenient way to get an instant replacement part by grounding an aircraft for supply, which greatly upsets the advisors.*

### Summary and Conclusion

The 3d AD's greatest challenge in 1970 and 1971 was the doubling of the aircraft in its inventory with the activation of four (three Huey, one Chinook) helicopter squadrons. Since its activation, the majority of the 3d AD's operations were in Cambodia. Operational necessity hindered the training of the newly-activated helicopter squadrons.

Associated with this increase in aircraft was the similar increase in personnel, especially in helicopter and maintenance personnel. (See

[REDACTED]

Figure 7.) There was a shortage of middle management personnel in maintenance, especially 7- and 9-level NCOs. There were a few highly trained and experienced NCOs, but the vast majority of the men were young, newly-inducted personnel. The solution for the VNAF was an aggressive OJT program, but a major problem associated with the OJT program was a failure to use TOs.<sup>74/</sup> One recommended was that a Vietnamese-English publication be developed to enable the Vietnamese to read the technical material in their own language.<sup>75/</sup>

Despite the lack of desire to fly at night, combat operations were conducted very professionally. Fighter missions were flown in a cool, confident, and responsible manner. New helicopter pilots were being trained to fill combat-ready positions.

The 3d AD's greatest problem was maintenance. Although the maintenance organization was being streamlined, the bulk of the maintenance personnel remained 3-level airmen. U.S. advisory personnel were working themselves out of jobs in many fields, but maintenance not only required advisors, but also American augmentee teams to supplement the VNAF maintenance effort in critical areas.

During the last few years the I&M program recruited and trained an entire 40,000-man Air Force around a small nucleus of senior officers and NCOs. In the Third Air Division, the program was moving along on schedule, and the AFAT-3 Chief strongly advised against speeding it up any more when he said, "the present schedule is a realistic one. We

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are turning equipment and facilities over to the Vietnamese as quickly as possible." Finally, he expressed the sentiments of his whole advisory team when he said, "they are patriotic and capable warriors. They will give a good account of themselves when the time comes."<sup>76/</sup>

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## FOOTNOTES

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## CHAPTER IV THE FOURTH AIR DIVISION

### Overview

The Fourth Military Region (MR 4) was South Vietnam's funnel-shaped southern quarter, the heart of the Mekong Delta. An area of 16 provinces bordered to the north by Cambodia and the South Vietnamese province of Long An (some 25 miles south of Saigon), to the west by the Gulf of Thailand, and to the east and south by the South China Sea, MR 4 was a flat, wet, fertile, and densely populated region containing nearly half the population of South Vietnam.

MR 4 was to play a distinctly important and unique role in all three phases of the Improvement and Modernization (I&M) of the VNAF from 1968 to 1971. For one thing, because of the nature of its terrain, and more important, its geographical isolation from major North Vietnamese strongholds, the Delta area had generally been infiltrated by enemy guerrilla or small force rather than large force bands. Thus, except for the Mobile Riverine Force and small Special Forces units, no U.S. troops had normally operated in the area until Operation Deckhouse V in 1967 when the U.S. 9th Infantry initiated two years of intensive antiguerrilla activities. Otherwise, MR 4 had been and continued to be primarily a Vietnamese area of operations.<sup>1/</sup>

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From 1965 on, tactical air support for the 7th, 9th, and 21st ARVN Divisions was carried out in significant proportion by the VNAF 74th Tactical Wing, transferred in August of 1965 to the newly built Binh Thuy Air Base located near Can Tho in the central Mekong Delta on the bank of the Hau Giang (Bassac) river. In fact, the 74th's 520th Fighter Squadron, flying A-1H Skyraiders, had the distinction of being the only tactical fighter unit stationed in MR 4 (fixed-wing American units flew from other bases outside MR 4). A mark of this squadron's achievement was its operational record in the period 1 July 1966 - 30 June 1967, when it flew 10,701 sorties and accounted for 1,127 Viet Cong killed by air and for which it was recommended for the Presidential Unit Citation.<sup>2/</sup> The 74th Tactical Wing also included the 116th Liaison Squadron and the 217th Helicopter Squadron, thus giving the Wing a combined capability for air strike, air mobility, reconnaissance, and forward air control.

This pre-1968 VNAF build-up in MR 4 was extremely important in that the region was already a proving ground for the extensive I&M planning in early 1968 (Program I) and its sequel in June of that year (Program II), which called for a doubling of VNAF strength to 40 squadrons, 934 aircraft, and 35,000 personnel over a five-year period. As one CHECO report put it, the situation in MR 4 was unique because "it presented a rough analogy with what all of Vietnam would be like at the end of Phase II when U.S. forces were largely withdrawn from combat."<sup>3/</sup>

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By 1969, that analogy was providing true, as demonstrated both by combat operations and operations control. The 74th had been further enlarged by the activation of the 211th Helicopter Squadron, the first VNAF squadron to have its H-34s replaced by UH-1 Hueys and the 1969 selection as the Best Combat Squadron in the VNAF.<sup>4/</sup> The Wing's growing helicopter capability, moreover, complemented a gradual VNAF assumption of tactical air control in MR 4.

For the Tactical Air Control System (TACS):<sup>5/</sup>

*... the goal of Phase II was to upgrade the Forward Air Controllers (FACs), Air Liaison Officers (ALOs), and Direct Air Support Centers (DASCs), so they could control VNAF and USAF airstrikes in support of the ARVN.*

Turning over tactical air control in the Delta to the VNAF was a process desirable and more easily facilitated because of the high percentage of ARVN operations there. But the upgrading/training was even more productive than anticipated. By the summer of 1969, at a time when the U.S. 9th Infantry Division was being redeployed from the Delta, VNAF FACs were training some of their own personnel and had officially taken over FAC responsibilities for the 7th and 9th ARVN Division. By September, the VNAF had already begun to assume responsibility for IV DASC operations at Can Tho. By January 1970, the USAF 22d Tactical Air Support Squadron (22 TASS) at Binh Thuy had trained itself out of a job and packed up,

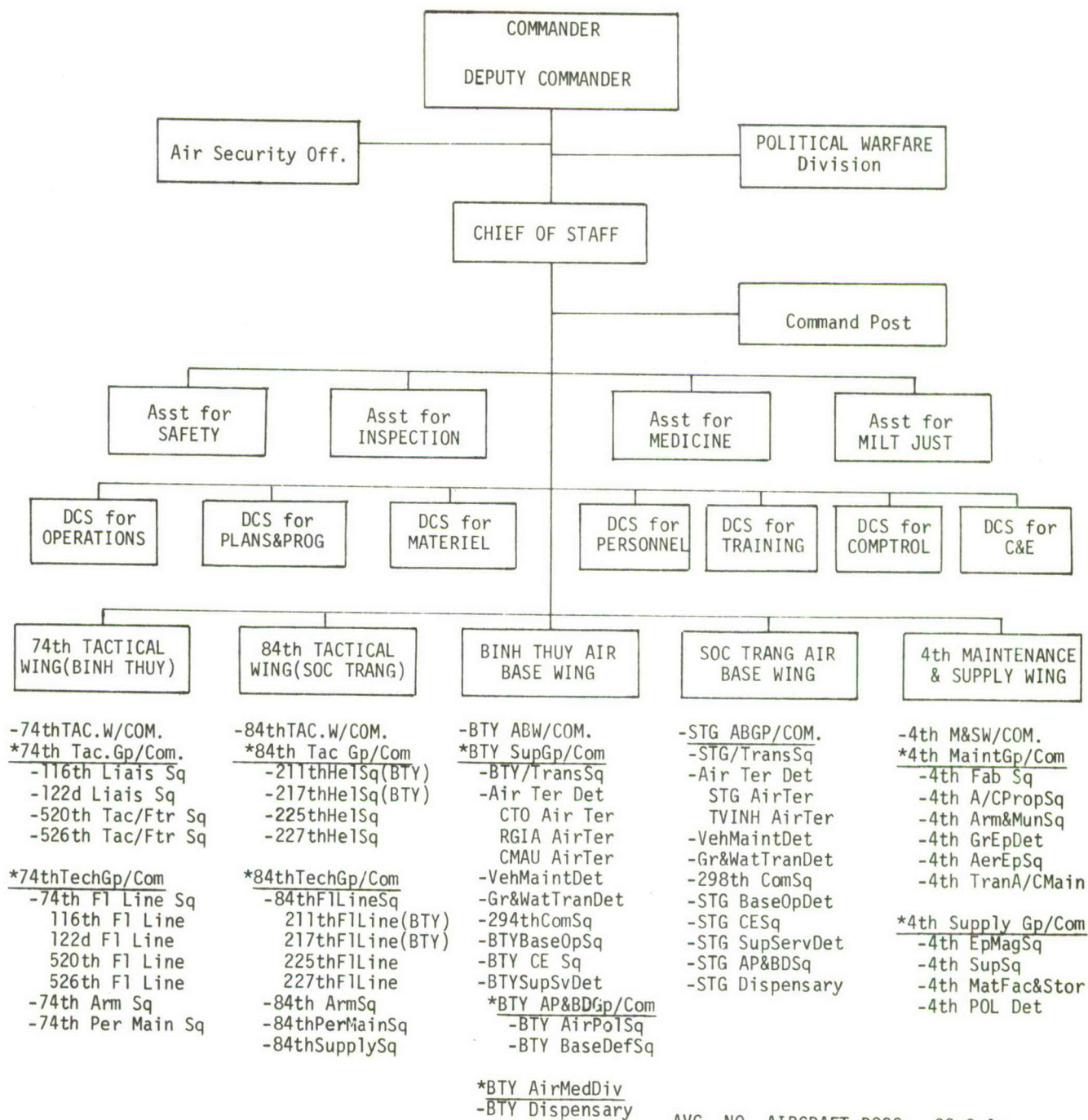
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after turning over its remaining O-1 Bird Dogs to the new VNAF 122d Liaison Squadron.<sup>6/</sup> It thereby became the first VNAF unit to activate early (by some 17 months) under an accelerated I&M program and enabled it, although under strength, to begin operations immediately.<sup>7/</sup>

The early months of 1970 were significant and dynamic ones in the Improvement and Modernization of the VNAF. Of long-term consequence was the planning of an even more accelerated I&M, the Consolidated RVNAF Improvement and Modernization Program (CRIMP, sometimes referred to as Program III), which called for a further increase of VNAF strength to 50 squadrons, 1,300 aircraft, and 52,200 personnel by mid-1973.<sup>8/</sup> Of more immediate importance, however, was the continued reorganization and expansion of the VNAF under Program II into five Air Divisions and 22 wings (10 tactical, five maintenance and supply, and seven air base). The Fourth Air Division (4AD) had the distinction of being the first of these to activate.

In March, the 74th Tactical Wing at Binh Thuy was reorganized to include the 520th Fighter Squadron, the 116th and 122d Liaison Squadrons, and the new 526th Fighter Squadron, to be activated in October 1970. The 211th and 217th Helicopter Squadrons, on the other hand, were reorganized into the newly-formed 84th Tactical Wing and Combat Group of the 4AD and augmented by the 225th and 227th Helicopter Squadrons, the latter activated in October and November.<sup>9/</sup> (See Figure 1.) Leaving the 211th and 217th

# 4th AIR DIVISION ORGANIZATION



DIVISION MANNING: 786 Officers  
1444 NCOs  
3120 Airmen  
TOTAL 5350

(Figures for June 71)

AVG. NO. AIRCRAFT POSS: 30 O-1s  
12 U-17s  
129 UH-1Hs  
38 A-37Bs

SOURCE: VNAF Status Review, June 1971, (S), and VNAF Programming Plan 70-1, 15 January 1970, (C).

FIGURE 1

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at Binh Thuy, on 1 November the 84th Tactical Wing moved its headquarters to the newly acquired helicopter base at Soc Trang some 38 miles SE of Binh Thuy. Originally built by the French in 1935 and used by the Japanese during the Second World War, Soc Trang, despite its small size, had been converted by the U.S. Army into the largest helicopter base in the Delta. When it was turned over to the VNAF in ceremonies attended by the Secretary of the Air Force, it became the first sole-use VNAF base in any of the five division areas.<sup>10/</sup>

In sum, by early 1971 Modernization and Improvement of the VNAF in MR 4 had come a long way. The VNAF had taken over the operation and support of Soc Trang and for all practical purposes Binh Thuy as well, and had taken over complete control of the MR 4 Direct Air Support System. In addition, it had in a little over one year drastically escalated and in fact doubled its operational capacity, as a contrast of February 1970 (pre-4AD activation) and June 1971 VNAF statistics demonstrates. For instance, in February 1970 the 74th TW had five squadrons, 2,700 personnel, some 112 aircraft possessed, and flew approximately 6,400 hours and 11,900 sorties. In June 1971, however, the 74th and 84th TWs had eight squadrons, 5,370 personnel (includes the Binh Thuy and Soc Trang Air Base Wings plus the 4th Maintenance and Supply Wing), 209 aircraft, and flew approximately 13,525 hours and 19,682 sorties. And plans were underway to augment division strength by an additional 36 aircraft (12 A-37s, 20 O-1s, and 4 U-17s) by late 1972. (See Figure 2.)<sup>11/</sup>

# 4th AIR DIVISION-AIRCRAFT BUILDUP '68-'73

SOURCES: VNAF Statistical Summaries, '68-'69,  
VNAF Status Reviews, '70-'71 (S)

No. Aircraft

250 —

200 —

150 —

100 —

50 —

I&M PROGRAM I I&M PROGRAM II I&M PROGRAM III

31 Mar 68

30 Sep 68

31 Mar 69

30 Sep 69

31 Mar 70

30 Sep 70

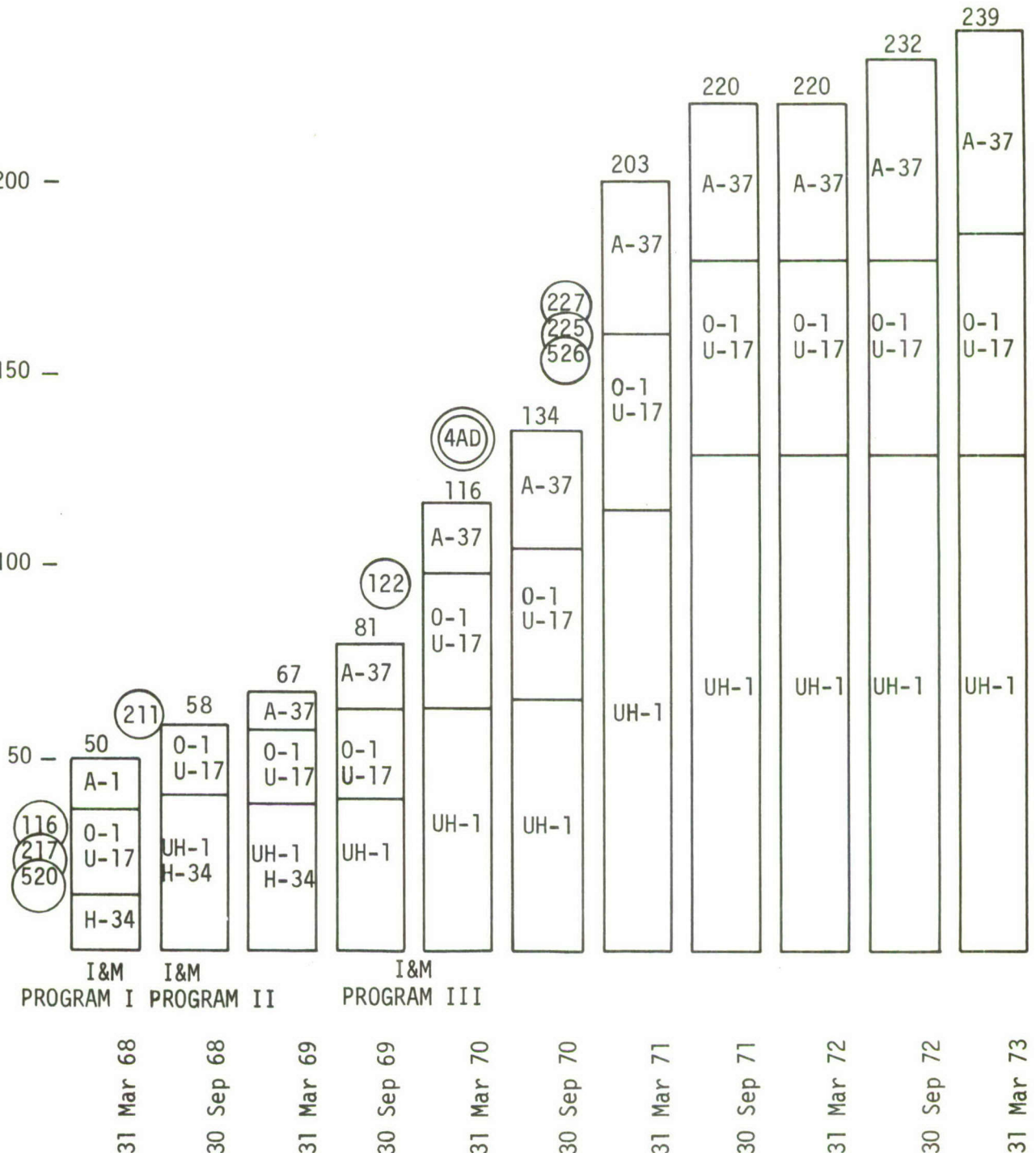
31 Mar 71

30 Sep 71

31 Mar 72

30 Sep 72

31 Mar 73



○ = Squadron Activation

**SECRET**

## Facilities Turnover

### Soc Trang

Soc Trang airfield consisted of a 3,280-foot asphaltic concrete runway with parking aprons, open revetments for two helicopter squadrons, and associated utility systems. (See Figure 3.) When in November 1970 the U.S. Army handed over 238 facilities to the VNAF 4th Air Division, Soc Trang became the first sole VNAF-run, VNAF-use base in South Vietnam. By 31 July 1971, the facility turnover rate was 98 percent for a total of 278 facilities. Indeed, a small contingent of U.S. advisors (Det 4, AFAT-4) remained at the base to render some assistance (in July 1971 at the time of this writing that contingent included only about 36 advisory and support personnel) and 18 joint Red Horse and Naval OIC construction projects totalling \$966,000 were completed in order to upgrade and augment existing facilities, such as runway and aprons, base ammo storage, electrical prime power generation, housing, water supply and distribution mains, etc.<sup>12/</sup> But the VNAF was supplying the operations and maintenance force. Its Civil Engineering Squadron, noted the End-of-Tour Report by Lt Col Stanley M. Johnson, AFAT-4's Det 4 Chief, was:<sup>13/</sup>

*The first in Vietnam to assume total responsibility for maintenance, repair, and operation of a base. This is particularly significant since the squadron was the last Civil Engineering Squadron formed in Vietnam. . . . [and] consisted of more than 90 percent personnel with less than three months Civil Engineering experience.*

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SOC TRANG AIRFIELD

FIGURE 3

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[REDACTED]

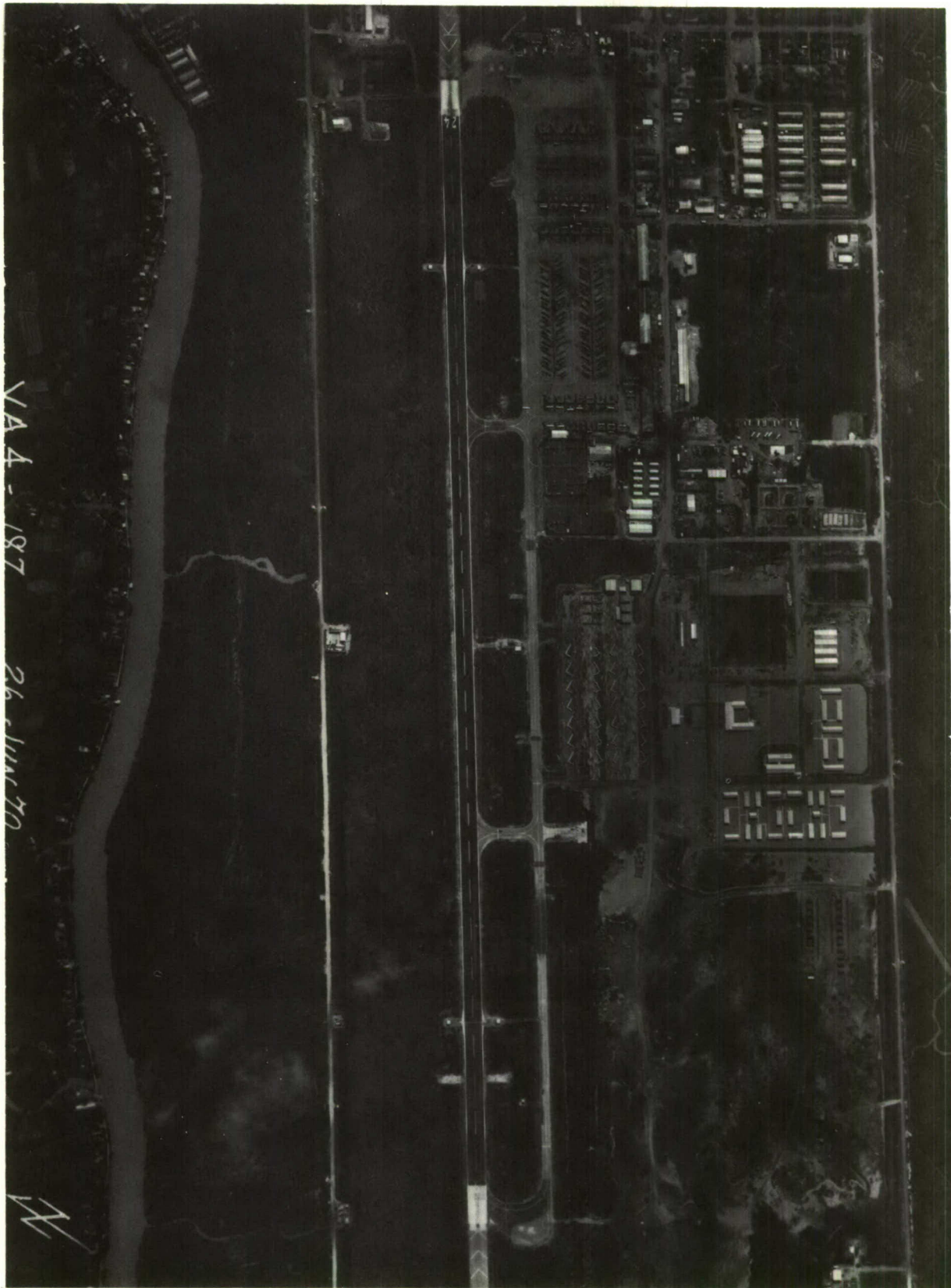
As another member of the AFGP put it, the base had been stripped pretty clean before the VNAF took over and there was need of extensive construction, repair, and renovation, but the VNAF did a "hell of a job."<sup>14/</sup>

Of course, such rapid expansion was not without its problems. Added to the lack of experience was poor support management, shortage of supplies, and damaging disciplinary problems among the VNAF power production personnel who because of their 24-hour shifts frequently absented themselves from or slept on the job and were thus responsible in early 1971 for major damage to five or six generators.<sup>15/</sup> Yet these could be classified as growing pains rather than long-term crises. On the other hand, the critical problem of note was that, Soc Trang, because of its limited support facilities could accommodate only two helicopter squadrons, necessitating the location of half the 84th Tactical Wing at Binh Thuy and resulting in an undesirable administrative and operational split. And in the summer of 1971, expansion of Soc Trang either with or without U.S. aid was at best a remote hope.

#### Binh Thuy

Binh Thuy airfield consisted of a 6,000-foot asphalt runway with parallel taxiway and an asphalt parking apron with open aircraft revetments. (See Figure 4.) By 31 July 1971, the USAF had turned over 255 of its 391 base facilities to the VNAF for a 66 percent turnover, and the rate was speeding up.<sup>16/</sup> Hard facilities not yet relinquished included the power production plant, communications buildings, airlift control

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BINH THUY AIRFIELD  
FIGURE 4

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[REDACTED]

elements, some civil engineering facilities, and the motor pool area, yet most of these were being readied for turnover. Moreover, the 66 percent rate was a misleading indicator since most of the U.S. facilities were VNAF-owned and thus only occupied or shared by the U.S. under land-use concurrence. The joint VNAF-USAF Aircraft Control and Warning (AC&W) radar site, for instance, was technically a VNAF facility whose function the USAF shared. According to one advisor, then, the 66 percent was a function turnover rate only: the real facility turnover was almost 90 percent.<sup>17/</sup>

At this time, the U.S. Advisor force (AFAT-4) numbered 56, plus nine military augmentees and the soon-to-depart 6255th Air Base Squadron. With the redeployment of the 19th Tactical Air Support Squadron (19 TASS) in late July and the planned redeployment of two Army YO-3As in early November, no U.S. planes would remain,\* AFAT-4 would be largely self-supporting, and it was estimated that the USAF base population would fall to 125 personnel or less by the end of the year, a decrease of some 350 people in less than six months.<sup>18/</sup> Binh Thuy, then, was an example of Vietnamization at its optimum pace.

\*Not included in these figures is a Navy unit (Light Attack Sq 4) of 14 OV-10 Broncos, officially bedded down at nearby Navy Binh Thuy (U.S), but with tenant status at Binh Thuy Air Base because their own runway was too short.

[REDACTED]

As for renovation of storage, administration, and aircraft maintenance areas, facilities had been repaired and augmented under an \$11,996,000 construction program.<sup>19/</sup> In addition, VNAF Civil Engineers were beginning construction of 450 Family Shelters. They had also assumed full base crash, rescue, and fire-fighting responsibilities. Communications and Electronics personnel were nearly self-sufficient and the Base Defense Group had already placed first in VNAF competition.<sup>20/</sup> Again as with Soc Trang there were many problems, but most of them could be characterized as inevitable growing pains, while others (such as poor runway drainage during the rainy season), if not immediately solvable, were endurable.

### Training

By the summer of 1971, training of VNAF support personnel in MR 4 was making slow but steady progress as witnessed by the following selected data. At Soc Trang, the U.S. Army had conducted selected but extensive training in areas such as communications and helicopter maintenance before turning over their helicopters to the VNAF and re-deploying. After that time, U.S. personnel, particularly military augmentees, ran on-the-job training (OJT) programs in such areas as supply, civil engineering, and communications-electronics. And the VNAF Training Office established a General Military Training program for enlisted personnel and a second General Military Training Course for pilots.<sup>21/</sup> At Binh Thuy, training was understandably more extensive. Formal training

[REDACTED]

in a variety of areas was conducted by USAF Mobile Training Teams (MTTs), and the Philco-Ford and Trans-Asia Corporations contract trained in 20 Civil Engineering career AFSCs. Advisory personnel also set up English Language Refresher Courses (at both Bases). As for the VNAF Training Office at Binh Thuy, it served in FY 1971 as a basic recruit processing center for some 1,050 basics and administered an entire basic training program to 242 students.<sup>22/</sup> In July 1971, it was training 217 more. Its initiative and improvization in successfully undertaking such programs caused an enthusiastic AFAT-4 counterpart to label it nearly 100 percent proficient; "its running by itself."<sup>23/</sup>

Two other types of training carried on at Soc Trang and Binh Thuy were VNAF-run OJT Training and the joint 7th Air Force-AFGP Integrated Training Program. The former, which aimed at proficiency, upgrading, and job transitioning among VNAF enlisted personnel, was understandably weak because of "the need for more highly qualified personnel and the "little carry over from one assignment to the next." Such weakness was being carefully examined in a joint AFGP-VNAF coordination on a new OJT manual and OJT recording system.<sup>24/</sup> The latter type of training, however, whereby VNAF officers and NCOs were put into training programs with USAF personnel was very successful, particularly in the Base Support functions. The AFAT-4 Training advisor at Binh Thuy (FY 1970), felt that Integrated Training was "the single, most important program," and served to "give the VNAF the capability to not only conduct air combat operations in the

[REDACTED]

Delta but to have the complete support capability to sustain them."<sup>25/</sup>  
By the summer of 1971, Integrated Training was diminishing due to phase-down of USAF units, but this in itself reflected the progress of the I&M mission in MR 4.<sup>26/</sup>

As a step toward solving some of the English Language problems discussed earlier in this report, Job Training Standards (JTSs) for 17 career areas were translated into Vietnamese and forwarded to Hq VNAF as inputs to a new JTS manual for all career areas. Moreover, a new type of training aid being given close scrutinization in MR 4 was the Job Performance Aid (JPA), a bilingual manual with simplified and profusely illustrated step-by-step directions for maintenance inspections, general aircraft maintenance, and troubleshooting. Widespread use of the JPAs was problematic for two reasons: first, they contained technical errors caused, in part, by imperfect computer translation of English into Vietnamese. Second, the VNAF mechanics were slow in using them, partly because senior NCOs who had taken great pains to learn English showed signs of being upset that young mechanics might no longer need their assistance in explaining maintenance techniques, but mostly because of pride and habit (mechanics felt they didn't need instruction aids for familiar jobs). As one report put it, mechanics "resort to their use only on these jobs which are unfamiliar to them or at other times when the advisors are in the area and can observe their use or lack of use."<sup>27/</sup>  
Nevertheless, AFAT-4 advisors generally felt that the JPAs if corrected

[REDACTED]

would prove useful and that with time the VNAF would adopt them as substitutes for English language Technical Orders (TOs). As for the errors, they had been noted by advisory and VNAF personnel, studied by a research team from Wright-Patterson AFB, and forwarded on through proper channels for future revision.<sup>28/</sup>

### Operations

At the time of this writing, the VNAF had assumed responsibility for well over 90 percent of the air operations in MR 4, the vast majority of which were flown by the 4AD. Indeed, this increasing Vietnamization of the air war in the Delta must be viewed in light of decreasing large-force enemy activities and the phasedown of U.S. air support. But the 4AD still flew more sorties and more hours than any other division; in fact, from July 1970 through June 1971, it flew 30 percent of all VNAF operational hours and 39 percent of all VNAF operational sorties, and it participated significantly in Cambodian operations.<sup>29/</sup>

### Fighters

One of the most impressive records in the VNAF was that of the 74th Tactical Wing (Binh Thuy): the exploits of its 520th Tactical Fighter Squadron were mentioned earlier in this chapter. The 526th TFS was a new squadron, and it had flown missions on the day it was activated (1 October 1970) and over 2,400 combat sorties prior to being declared Operationally Ready (OR) on 1 April 1971. Together, the two squadrons had flown (as of 31 May 1971) 12,635 hours without a major accident. Such a record gives credence to their advisor's claim that the 74th fighter pilots were

[REDACTED]

very experienced. <sup>30/</sup>

There were, however, limitations to the combat effectiveness of the A-37s. Their growing night capability was practically cancelled out because of the absence of VNAF night FAC coverage, although it must be pointed out that there wasn't much demand for the A-37s at night anyway. For night air support, the ARVN was utilizing the U.S. Navy OV-10s of Light Attack Squadron 4 (the "Black Ponies") and UH-1s of Light Attack Squadron 3 (the "Sea Wolves"), three VNAF AC-47 gunships based at Tan Son Nhut and operating from Binh Thuy in detachment status, and a few VNAF Huey gunships from Binh Thuy and Soc Trang.

A more serious problem was the fact that the A-37s' ground alert posture was inadequate in both armament configuration and scramble response time to meet ARVN requirements. But again there were extenuating circumstances. The ARVN failed to put much pressure on the VNAF to modify ordnance (the ordnance was available but seldom requested) because they preferred the OV-10s for rapid close air support. These were all, however, short-term rather than long-term problems and steps were already being taken to remedy them. While VNAF FAC night instrument capability was still a year away, advisors were working to promote ARVN understanding of and increased ARVN demand for VNAF fighter assets. <sup>31/</sup>

### Helicopters

With the gradual winding down of the war in the Delta and the guerrilla level of enemy activity there, air mobility had become the most crucial

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aspect of air operations in MR 4. Thus, the troop support mission of the 84th Tactical Wing's 211th, 217th, 225th, and 227th Helicopter Squadrons was the most important of all. Given this responsibility, deficiencies in helicopter operations were perhaps more critical than those in fixed wing operations. One problem already discussed was the unfortunate administrative split occasioned by limited space at Soc Trang: the 211th and 217th Squadrons had to beddown at Binh Thuy, 38 miles from their headquarters. Other problems included deficiency in standardization/evaluation (4AD had no Stan/Eval Officer) and lagging helicopter instrument and night training due to limited availability of aircraft.<sup>32/</sup>

Yet these deficiencies were far outweighed by the 84th Wing's considerable flying achievements. For instance, its newest squadrons, the 225th and 227th, had flown their first combat missions six and four and one-half months respectively before the programmed dates. And the 227th did so with only four experienced officers out of an authorized 78, a demonstration of the "quality of the VNAF training, aircrew discipline and safety programs."<sup>33/</sup> The 84th's accident/combat loss figures during the same period were five and 13.<sup>34/</sup> Moreover, by the summer of 1971, inexperience at Soc Trang was becoming less of a problem since the average flying hours per pilot had climbed to about 500.<sup>35/</sup> Add to this the remark quoted earlier in this report: "these VNAF helicopter pilots are every bit as good, and in some instances better, than pilots of a comparable U.S. unit."<sup>36/</sup>

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While maintenance shortsightedness and the traditional VNAF non-chalance toward standardization/evaluation cannot be ignored,\* it should also be pointed out that the 84th TW had heavy operational commitments, more so than any other VNAF helicopter unit. With an average Combat Readiness (CR) of less than 60 percent, its 124 Hueys were attempting to provide the support which had been shared before U.S. phasedown by 800 choppers. And combat took its toll. From 1 July 1970 to 31 May 1971, the Wing had 24 aircraft destroyed and 51 damaged, many of these in Cambodian operations. By July, given combat and accident damage, routine wear-and-tear, and training/testing/Med-Evac/VIP/standby commitments the 84th was only able to mount three assault packages (27 aircraft total) on a daily, sustained basis.\*\* With signs of decreasing Not Operationally Ready/Maintenance (NORM) and Not Operationally Ready/Supply (NORS) rates, however, it was hoped that a daily capability of four to five assault packages would be a reality.<sup>37/</sup>

\*While the 4AD squadron lacked formal standardization/evaluation it should nevertheless be noted that commanders evaluated their own pilots, an applied personal leadership which was invaluable even if sometimes impractical by American standards.

\*\*An assault package included five troop slicks, three gunships (one on standby), and a command-and-control helicopter (9). Normally if three squadrons mounted an assault package (27), the fourth would provide logistic as well as Med-Evac support (it was estimated that some 22 aircraft were needed for logistic as well as training purposes, a grand total of 49 aircraft). Thus, if all Combat Ready aircraft were available (usually between 65 and 70), the 84th could mount a fourth assault package as well. But this depended on VIP and other special demands.

[REDACTED]

Helicopter operations were also looking up in two other areas. Training-wise, on 1 July, 10 VNAF crews had begun night cross-training with the U.S. Navy Sea Wolves, a significant step in building up Huey night capability.<sup>38/</sup> Second, on 2 March 1971, a U.S. Army/VNAF Medical Evacuation (Med-Evac) cross-training program had been initiated under the auspices of the 57th and 82d Medical Detachments, a program which was proving an unqualified success. By the end of April 12, VNAF crews had finished training and by the end of May were handling over 50 percent of the MR 4 patient pickups, as well as effecting a fourfold increase in patient evacuation per flying hour. VNAF teams were in the process of building to a Med-Evac capability of five UH-1s per day and an assumption of total Delta Med-Evac responsibility by September.<sup>39/</sup>

#### Liaison Aircraft

As of September 1970, the 74th Tactical Wing's veteran 116th Liaison Squadron and the newer 122d Liaison Squadron, activated in January 1970--17 months ahead of schedule, had with O-1s and U-17s officially assumed full daytime visual reconnaissance, forward air control (FAC), and political warfare responsibilities in MR 4. In addition, they managed to significantly support 1970-71 Cambodian operations and supplement VNAF FAC operations in MR 3, an operational responsibility which in one year cost them five O-1 Bird Dogs destroyed and eight damaged. The two Binh Thuy Squadrons were thus becoming more experienced, and assuming more responsibility for the air war in MR 4.<sup>40/</sup>

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But there were other problems. First, the two squadrons had no night FAC capability because of a delay in their expected receipt of Combat Required Operational Capability (CROC) 14-70, in short the installation of Tactical Air Navigation (TACAN) and improved instrument lighting. In the meantime, each aircraft had to rely on its Automatic Direction Finder (ADF) and two lamps on either side of the cockpit. This was, of course, a relatively short-term problem since the modification kits were expected late in the year and pilots and observers were already being trained for night FAC work. It was anticipated that the training modification program would be completed by the summer of 1972.<sup>41/</sup> A second and more serious problem, however, was the ARVN ignorance of VNAF FAC capability and its reluctance to depend upon VNAF FAC support in the first place. In the past, such misunderstanding had also hindered VNAF fighters and helicopter support of the ARVN, misunderstanding promoted by different philosophies of air support among USAF and U.S. Army advisors, but never to the same degree.<sup>42/</sup>

*This problem results from poor coordination between ARVN G-2/G-3 personnel and the VNAF ALOs. ARVN personnel do not appear to have the desire nor the know how to effectively use the VNAF FAC assets at their disposal. The situation is further compounded by low ranking, nonaggressive VNAF ALOs who receive little supervision through VNAF channels and hold little esteem with the ARVN.*

The ARVN, with the graces of their U.S. Army advisors, thus preferred to seek the services of Army L-19s and the 32 Army O-1s still scattered

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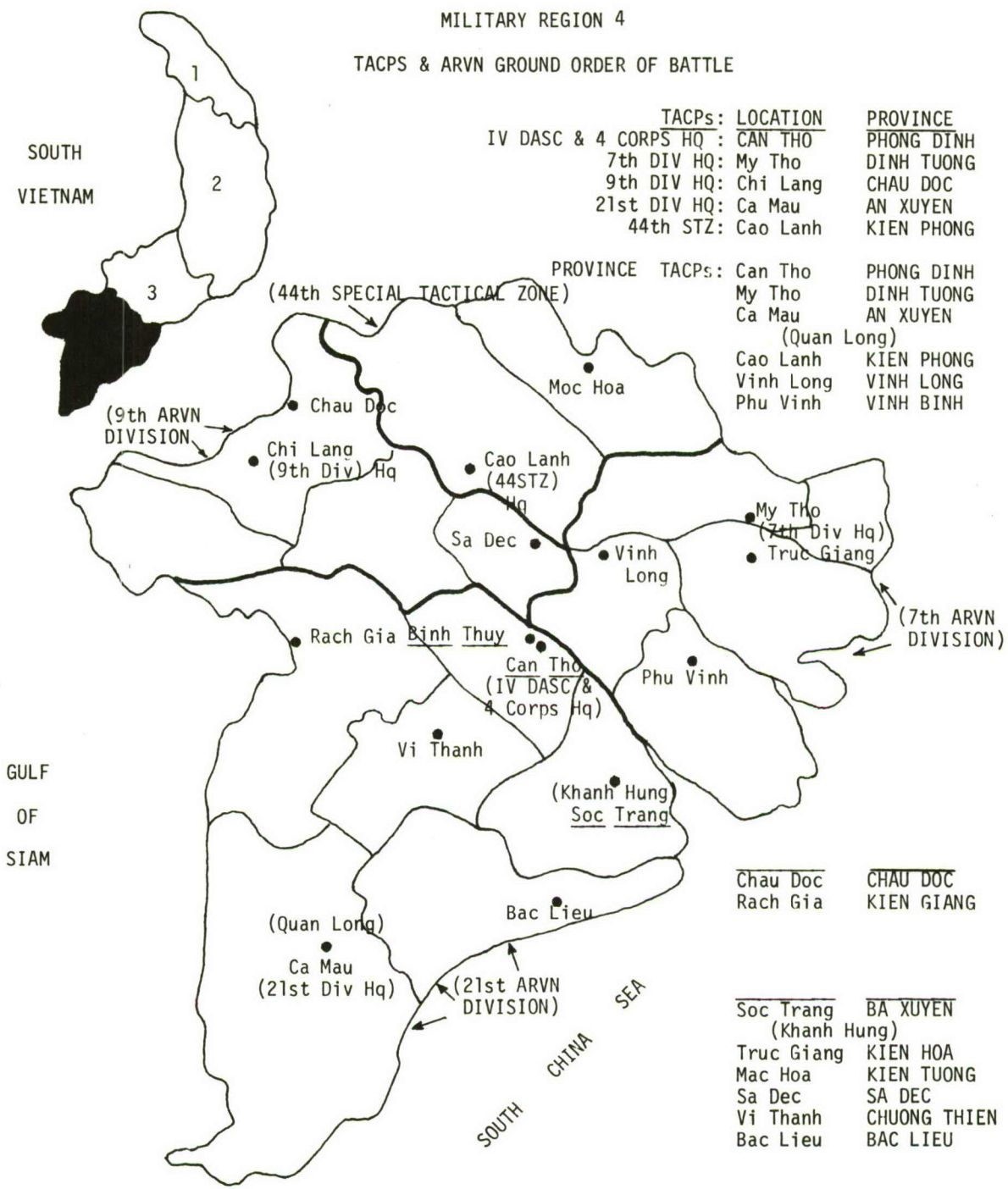
throughout the Delta area. This was perhaps natural, but particularly unfortunate in view of U.S. phaseout of operations in the Delta and the impending Army pullout, which would leave VNAF-ARVN-FAC relationship still uncoordinated. AFAT-4 personnel were promoting briefings to Province and ARVN Division senior advisors on O-1 FAC capability in an attempt to solve this problem before it was too late.<sup>43/</sup>

#### Tactical Air Control

It must be remembered that the Fourth Air Division was not empowered to direct FAC/Air Liaison Officer (ALO)/ARVN coordination because of the different structuring of the VNAF Tactical Air Control System. Fourth AD FAC sorties were fragged by the IV Direct Air Support Center (DASC) at Can Tho, headquarters for all MR 4 ALOs and an element of the separate Air Operations Command (AOC). In essence IV DASC would assign a FAC to an ALO in one of the 19 Tactical Air Control Parties (TACPs) scattered throughout the Delta. These 19 included the IV Corps TACP; those attached to the three ARVN Divisions (7th, 9th, and 21st) and the 44th Special Tactical Zone (STZ); and 14 Province or Sector TACPs. (See Figure 5.) The ALOs, in turn, would serve as middle men, directing their FACs according to ARVN specifications and needs.<sup>44/</sup>

As complicated as it was, since the VNAF AOC had taken over full operational responsibility for IV DASC on 20 October 1970, the system had held up and the 4AD's 294th Communications Squadron was excelling in supporting radio communications at each of the TACP sites.<sup>45/</sup> A weak

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SOURCE: VNAF TACP CHART, Sft cpy, VNAF HQ (C)

FIGURE 5

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link in the TACS chain-of-command, however, was the one previously alluded to: because experience was at such a premium in its fast expanding force structure the VNAF had assigned to the ARVN ALOs who were inexperienced junior officers (some of them were even pilot training washouts).<sup>46/</sup> Because of this ARVN leaders were distrustful of VNAF FAC capability. This dilemma was so critical that it caused one frustrated AFAT-4 advisor to exclaim, "it seems the minute the advisor turns his back the system collapses." Nevertheless, that same advisor was quick to warn his successor:<sup>47/</sup>

*Don't try to make the VNAF system function like the USAF TACS were the MR and Division ALOs take the initiative and lead the way. Do the best you can with what you've got.*

This was sound advice, the type of approach taken by AFGP ALO/FAC advisors. And in July 1971, things were already improving. The VNAF had recognized the problem and had identified 28 majors as Corps and Division ALO prospects. It was expected that 10 to 15 of those would be selected for immediate ALO duty, a move which in MR 4 would complement the FAC briefings initiated by 4AD.<sup>48/</sup>

#### Materiel

Despite heavy operational commitments the Fourth Air Division's fighter (A-37) and liaison (O-1/U-17) Operationally Ready (OR) percentages had remained admirably high since late 1970--about 84 percent--well above VNAF standard of 71 percent. Moreover, their average Not

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Operationally Ready/Maintenance (NORM) and Not Operationally Ready/Supply (NORS) rates were satisfactorily low (below 5 percent). The OR status of the helicopters, however, was a different thing altogether. The average OR rate for the 84th's four squadrons was consistently around 68 percent, the NORM rate around 30 percent.<sup>49/</sup> And their average Combat Readiness (OR) percentage, a more accurate yardstick because it precluded aircraft in test-flight status, was only about 53 percent. The aircraft materiel picture for the month of June 1971, for instance, looked like this:<sup>50/</sup>

|               | <u>ACFT</u> | <u>OR%</u>  | <u>CR%</u>  | <u>NORM%</u> | <u>NORS%</u> |
|---------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| BTY           | A-37B       | 83.3        | 81.8        | 12.8         | 3.9          |
|               | O-1/U-17    | 83.0        | 78.0        | 11.3         | <u>5.7</u>   |
|               | UH-1H       | <u>57.0</u> | <u>50.0</u> | <u>39.1</u>  | 3.9          |
| STG           | UH-1H       | 71.8        | <u>56.4</u> | 22.1         | <u>6.1</u>   |
| VNAF Standard |             | 71%         | 71%         | 24%          | 5%           |

These figures meant that of the 84th Wing's 124 helicopters only about 70 were available for combat on a daily basis. There was good reason for this: the UH-1s were much more susceptible to ground fire and in fact flew three times as many hours as the A-37s on a squadron-to-squadron basis. Still, the remark made by one advisor that "a high operational ready rate does not seem to impress the VNAF as it does advisors. As long as they have enough aircraft to fly known missions they are not concerned" was an accurate one.<sup>51/</sup> The combat readiness status of the helicopters was adequate, but there was still room for improvement, especially if the operational commitment increased. The

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problem lay not in the quality of the maintenance being performed but in maintenance planning and support. For instance, the VNAF had proved they were capable of "getting as many aircraft as possible in commission and flying as many as are available" if the occasion arose, but this capacity was undermined by a poor preventive maintenance program and raised the question as to how long the VNAF could keep this up. Other weaknesses included apathy toward good safety habits and general house-keeping, poor scheduling and reporting procedures, inadequate standardization/evaluation, below-standard Aerospace Ground Equipment (AGE) maintenance, inadequate maintenance communications, and almost no maintenance training program. As for the supply picture, one advisor called it "dreadful;" the 4AD's Maintenance and Supply Wing had only 25 percent of its authorized vehicle strength, only about 60 percent of the Technical Orders (TOs) supposedly available, and a general shortage of bench stock and other maintenance equipment.<sup>52/</sup> Add to this weak supply discipline such as that demonstrated at Soc Trang:<sup>53/</sup>

*It is realized that it is against Vietnamese practice to question another individual concerning his area of responsibility. With the present VNAF supply system, especially at Soc Trang, . . . follow up action must be taken to insure timely delivery of urgently required repair parts. Although the VNAF are quick to requisition they are very slow to take any follow-up action, such as trying to increase the priority or even to make timely checks to insure that their requisition is still valid.*

This lack of initiative in both supply and maintenance too often manifested itself in a VNAF "tendency to allow the advisors to accomplish tasks which

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the VNAF trained and capable of performing. Often, because of a desire to see the job completed, the advisors do the work." However well-meant, <sup>54/</sup> this type of situation was hardly beneficial to the Vietnamization Program.

It was suggested that such problems as the 4AD experienced in maintenance and supply were "typical" manifestations of cultural lackadaisicalness, or that despite the VNAF tendency to take advantage of a good thing, materiel personnel would shape up as soon as USAF withdrawal was complete. The first argument, however, failed to measure up with VNAF initiative and progress in other areas, and while the tendency to "sponge" was real, it was inadequate in explaining those problems away. Moreover, the fact remains that some critical supplies were just not available. But the immediate reason for most maintenance and supply misfortunes was quite concrete: lack of experience and hence, lack of effective middle management.

In his End-of-Tour Report in July 1971, Colonel Franklyn Snyder, Chief of AFAT-4, noted that the lack of middle management was "the most significant weakness throughout the entire materiel area" and cited the 4AD's own Chief of Supply, a man incompetent as well as unmotivated, as a prime example. <sup>55/</sup> This individual was an extreme case, but the point is the VNAF just did not yet have enough competent materiel people to spread around. Conversely, given the proper time and training, the management situation was bound to improve. The second problem, however, only compounded the management dilemma and had nothing to do with training. When the VNAF reorganized in March 1970, it created for each of its Air

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Divisions a Maintenance and Supply Wing to handle supply for all division organizations and field level maintenance for division aircraft. At the same time, it created a Technical Group within each Wing to handle "organizational level maintenance," i.e., flight line support. (See Figure 1.)<sup>56/</sup> Ideally, the Maintenance and Supply Wing and in the case of the 4th MSW, the 74th and 84th Technical Groups were to perform separate functions and neatly complement each other. But at a time when good managers were at a premium what actually resulted was at times chaotic. Responsibility allocation was confusing and inadequately cited in VNAF directives, job function was duplicated, supply channels were muddled, coordination was weak. Advisors pointed out that the Technical Groups, for instance, were performing field as well as organizational maintenance. The problem was further compounded in MR 4 because of the Soc Trang situation. In effort, the 84th Technical Group was so isolated that it had to perform its own field maintenance. And its elements responsible for the 211th and 217th Helicopter Squadrons at Binh Thuy<sup>57/</sup> operated in their own vacuum, without firm supervision or support.

The only answer to the organizational dilemma was a restructuring of the VNAF Maintenance and Supply chain-of-command. Fortunately, just such a restructuring was approved by VNAF Headquarters in July 1971 due to the initiative of AFAT-4 and the Fourth Air Division Commander, Colonel Anh, as well as other AFAT and Division Commanders. Although the Vietnamese Joint General Staff had yet to act officially on the change they had given it tacit approval. Basically, the plan (see

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Figure 6) was: (1) to rename the 84th Technical Group the Soc Trang Maintenance and Supply Group and give it independent status, although responsible to the 4th Maintenance and Supply and 84th Wing Commanders; and (2) to incorporate the 74th Tech Group and elements of the 84th Tech Group at Binh Thuy into the 4th MS Wing as its organizational maintenance element, an incorporation which would solve many of the 4AD's materiel woes and economize on management and equipment.<sup>58/</sup> In the meantime, responsible officials were doing all they could to alleviate the other shortcomings, especially in the supply areas. This included such tasks as setting up a Repairable Processing Center at Soc Trang to expedite the delivery of aircraft needing major repair to the Air Logistics Command at Bien Hoa, or ensuring a more methodological replacement of bench stock items at both bases.<sup>59/</sup>

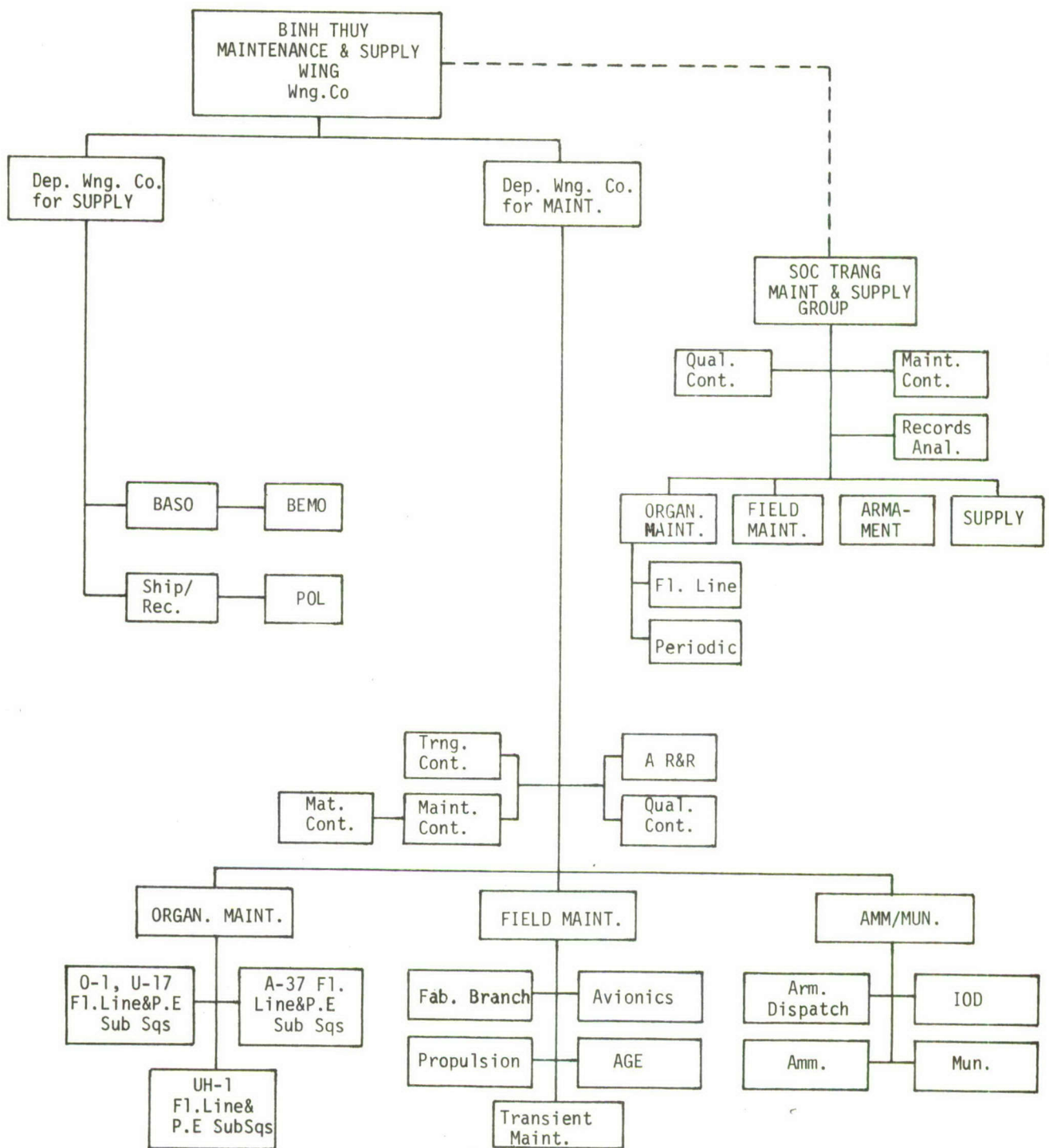
#### Conclusion

In early 1970, the problems which most plagued the VNAF in MR 4 were a poor night operational capability, a combat assault capability which was less than optimum, inexperienced ALOs, ragged coordination between VNAF and ARVN, inadequate materiel support, and an overall lack of middle management. Added to these were overcentralization of authority in higher echelons of command and the myriad political and cultural ramifications of the Vietnamese modus operandi, ramifications which at times hindered progress.

In the summer of 1971, most of these shortcomings remained to at least some degree. Yet, time was proving to be on the side of the VNAF.

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FOURTH AIR DIVISION MATERIEL REORGANIZATION  
SUMMER 1971



SOURCE: MATERIEL CHART, 4AD MSW HQ, Binh Thuy (Sft cpy-C)

FIGURE 6

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The problems were being ironed out, the experience level was rising, and despite their oftentimes different way of doing things, the personnel of the Fourth Air Division were performing their mission with ever improving professionalism. As for the advisory personnel of AFAT-4, they were living the letter of their slogan to work themselves out of their jobs and were doing so with commendable dedication, patience, and sense of responsibility. In their opinion, and in the opinion of this author, the Vietnamization Program in MR 4 was nearing a completion which was, at most, a year away.

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## FOOTNOTES

### CHAPTER IV

1. (S) CHECO Report IV DASC Operations, 1965-1969, Hq PACAF, 1 August 1969, p. 3.
2. (S) CHECO Report Air Operations in the Delta, Hq PACAF, 8 Dec 1967, pp. 10-11.
3. (S) CHECO Report VNAF Improvement and Modernization Program, Hq PACAF, 5 Feb 1970, pp. 43-44, 146 (Hereafter cited as CHECO Report VNAF I&M)
4. (S) Ibid, p. 73.
5. (S) Ibid, p. 21.
6. (S) Ibid, pp. 43, 46-47.
7. (S) Project CORONA HARVEST End-of-Tour Report, Brig Gen K. S. Young, Chief, AFGP, 15 Feb 1971, p. 3 (Hereafter cited as General Young Report.)
8. (S) Briefing, subj: "Planning for Vietnamization," 7AF (XPR), Mar 1971.
9. (S) VNAF Status Review, June 1971, and (C) VNAF Programming Plan 70-1, 15 Jan 1970.
10. (S) General Young Report, p. 26.
11. (S) VNAF Status Reviews, Feb 1970 and June 1971.
12. (S) General Young Report, p. 26; (C) Interview, topic: Vietnamization at Binh Thuy and Soc Trang, with Maj Robert L. Albertson, DCS/Plans Adv, AFAT-4, 13-14 & 29 July 1971 (Hereafter cited as Albertson Interview.)
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19. (S) General Young Report, p. 26.
20. (C) End-of-Tour Report, Col Franklin C. Snyder, Chief, AFAT-4, 6 Jul 1971, p. 3 (Hereafter cited as Snyder End-of-Tour.)
21. (C) Johnson End-of-Tour, Attachment 5, pp. 1-2.
22. (C) Snyder End-of-Tour, Attachment 6, pp. 1-3.
23. (U) Interview, topic: VNAF Training at Binh Thuy, with Capt Walter Young, DCS/Pers-Trg Adv and SM/Sgt John Richardson, Trg Adv, AFAT-4, 12 July 1971.
24. (C) Snyder End-of-Tour, Attachment 6, pp. 1-2.
25. (U) Ltr, Capt William E. McCarron to Capt Paul D. Knoke, subj: AFAT-4 Training Program FY 1970, 10 Jul 1971.
26. (S) VNAF Status Review, Jun 1971.
27. (C) Monthly Unit Advisor Report, AFAT-4, 5 Jun 1971, Attachment 3, p. 7; JPA problems revealed in (C) Interview, topic: The Materiel Picture for 4AD, with Lt Col John J. Duffy, Jr., Tech Gp Cmdr Adv, and Maj Marion E. Confer, 4 Maint Gp Cmdr Adv, AFAT-4, 12 July 1971 (Hereafter cited as Duffy-Confer Interview.)
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31. (U) Pacific Stars & Stripes, 25 & 29 Jul 1971 (Articles on U.S. Navy Black Ponies & U.S. Navy Sea Wolves by Spec 4 Dan Evans); (C) Snyder End-of-Tour, Attachment 3, pp. 5-6; (C) McIntosh Interview.
32. (C) Snyder End-of-Tour, Attachment 3, pp. 3 & 9, Attachment I of Attachment II.
33. (C) Ibid, Attachment 3, p. 1; (C) Johnson End-of-Tour, Attachment 2, p. 3.
34. (C) McIntosh Interview; (S) CINCPAC Summary of Air Operations Report, OPREA, Jan-Mar 1971, Reports OIA; (S) VNAF Status Review, Jan-Mar 1971.
35. (C) Interview, topic: 84th Wing Helicopter Operations, with Maj Chester Williams, 84th Cmbt Gp Cmdr Adv, AFAT-4 Det 4, 27 Jul 1971 (Hereafter cited as Williams Interview).
36. (U) Interview, Maj J. W. McElhoney, AFAT-4, with 7AF News, Aug 1970.
37. (C) Interview, topic: The Materiel Picture for 4AD, with Lt Col Seward M. Meintsma, DCS/Mat Adv, AFAT-4, 29 Jul 1971 (Hereafter cited as Meintsma Interview); (C) Snyder End-of-Tour, Attachment 1, p. 2; (C) Albertson Interview.
38. (C) Monthly Unit Advisor Report, AFAT-4, 5 Jun 1971, Attachment 2, p. 4.
39. (U) Interview, topic: 4AD Med Evac Capability, with Capt Paul E. Meuhring, Info Adv, AFAT-4, 13 Jul 1971; (C) Snyder End-of-Tour, Attachment 3, p. 1.
40. (C) Snyder End-of-Tour, Attachment 1, pp. 1-2, Attachment 3, pp. 1-2 and 10.
41. (C) Interview, topic: 74th Wing FAC Capability, with Maj Gordon S. Sargent, TAC/ALO Adv, AFAT-4, 12 Jul 1971.
42. (C) Snyder End-of-Tour, Attachment 3, p. 4.

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43. (C) Ibid, Attachment 3, p. 5.
44. (C) Interview, topic: The Tactical Air Control System in MR 4, with Maj Donald L. Schick, Opns Stf Off FAL/Liaison, AFGP, 20 Jul 1971 (Hereafter cited as Schick Interview); (C) Sargent Interview.
45. (C) Snyder End-of-Tour, Attachment 5, p. 1.
46. (C) Msg, AFAT-4 to AFGP, subj: VNAF ALO Advisors, 15 Feb 1971.
47. (C) End-of-Tour Report, Maj Leonard F. Thornton, 122 Sq Adv, AFAT-4, 5 Jun 1971, Attachment 1, p. 2.
48. (C) Staff Summary Sheet, subj: ALO/FAC Problems, Col Franklin C. Davies, DO 7AF, 10 Apr 1971; (C) Schick Interview.
49. (C) Snyder End-of-Tour, Attachment 1, p. 1.
50. (C) Monthly Unit Advisor Report, AFAT-4, 6 July 1971, Attachment 3, pp. 1 & 5.
51. (C) Johnson End-of-Tour, Attachment 1/1A, p. 6.
52. (C) Duffy-Confer Interview; (C) Snyder End-of-Tour, Attachment 1, pp. 6-10.
53. (C) Johnson End-of-Tour, Attachment 1/1C, p. 2.
54. (C) Ibid, Attachment 5, p. 3.
55. (C) Snyder End-of-Tour, p. 1.
56. (C) VNAF Programming Plan 70-1, p. 3 (Change 2), 10 Jan 1970.
57. (C) Interview, topic: The Materiel Picture at Soc Trang, with Maj Larry V. Whitehouse, 84th Tech Gp Cmdr Adv, Det 4, AFAT-4, 24 Jul 1971 (Hereafter cited as Whitehouse Interview); (C) Duffy-Confer Interview.
58. (C) Meintsma Interview; (C) Reorganization Chart for the 4AD Maintenance and Supply Wing (soft copy), Jul 1971.
59. (C) Whitehouse Interview.

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CHAPTER V  
THE FIFTH AIR DIVISION

The Situation in 1970

In January 1970, all fixed-wing airlift aircraft in the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) were based at Tan Son Nhut Air Base (AB). This force consisted of one squadron of 22 C-47s and one squadron of 18 C-119s. All VNAF fixed-wing gunship, reconnaissance, and special mission aircraft were also stationed at Tan Son Nhut. These various aircraft and their respective missions were assigned to the 33d Wing commanded by Colonel Phan Phung Tien.\*

The VNAF had substantial experience operating and maintaining the C-47--an earlier CHECO report speculated that VNAF pilots as a group had probably logged more flying hours in C-47s than in any other aircraft and they "certainly. . . had more maintenance experience with it."<sup>1/</sup> In January 1970, the 33d Wing had an average of 20 C-47s operationally ready (90.9%) but due to the transition of qualified C-47 pilots to other aircraft, the Wing had fallen to an average of 52 hours utilization per aircraft per month. This was well below the 75 hour per month

\*The 5th Air Division was activated on 1 January 1971. The Commander, Col Tien, and most of the Division Staff were drawn from the 33d Wing. As early as February 1970, the "VNAF Status Review" referred to the 33d Wing units as the 5th Air Division. To avoid confusion, this report will refer to the 5th Air Division throughout the period from 1 January 1970 to 1 July 1971, unless referring to specific operational missions of the 33d Wing.

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standard which the wing had exceeded for most of 1969. Thus, C-47 air-  
lift was limited by the availability of qualified crews.<sup>2/</sup> The C-47  
squadron was rated C-2.\*

Unlike the C-47, the C-119 was a relatively new aircraft for the  
VNAF. It entered the inventory in October 1968 when the 413th Squadron  
of the 33d Wing transitioned from C-47s. Maintenance problems hampered  
C-119 operations. In January 1970, the NORS rate was 9.1 percent, 4.1  
percent above the USAF standard. Crews for the C-119 squadron were  
still being trained. Of the 20 crews authorized only 11 were opera-  
tionally ready and, consequently, the C-119 squadron was rated C-3.<sup>3/</sup>  
Ironically, the C-119 squadron did not become self-sufficient until  
after USAF pilot and maintenance advisors were withdrawn in early 1970.<sup>4/</sup>

The AC-47 gunship squadron assigned to the 33d Wing benefited from  
both competent maintenance and favorable personnel actions. Formed in  
July 1969 by transition from C-47s to AC-47s, the squadron was rated  
C-1 by 31 August 1969.<sup>5/</sup>

The VNAF reconnaissance capability in January 1970 was very limited  
and consisted of one EC-47, three RC-47s and eight U-6s. These were  
all assigned to the 716th Reconnaissance Squadron which was rated C-2  
for lack of qualified crews.<sup>6/</sup>

NOTE: For a description of the several programs initiated to improve  
and modernize the VNAF see The Vietnamization of the Air War,  
1970-1971, PP. 3-5.

\*For a description of VNAF C Ratings, see the glossary.

FIFTH AIR DIVISION

January 1970

| <u>Unit</u> | <u>Type</u> | <u>UE</u> | Aircraft                     |                              |                             | Aircrews    |             |            |                 |
|-------------|-------------|-----------|------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|-------------|------------|-----------------|
|             |             |           | <u>Avg No</u><br><u>Asgd</u> | <u>Avg No</u><br><u>Poss</u> | <u>Avg No</u><br><u>O/R</u> | <u>Auth</u> | <u>Form</u> | <u>C/R</u> | <u>C-Rating</u> |
| 413th       | C-119       | 16        | 18.0                         | 18.0                         | 14.3                        | 20          | 11          | 11         | C-3             |
| 415th       | C-47        | 16        | 22.0                         | 21.0                         | 19.1                        | 20          | 12          | 12         | C-2             |
| 817th       | AC-47       | 16        | 18.0                         | 17.0                         | 16.4                        | 24          | 22          | 22         | C-1             |
| 716th       | EC-47       | 1         | 1.0                          | .6                           | .6                          | 5           | 2           | 2          | C-2             |
|             | RC-47       | 3         | 3.0                          | 2.0                          | 1.9                         |             |             |            |                 |
|             | U-6         | 8         | 9.0                          | 9.0                          | 8.1                         | 10          | 9           | 9          |                 |
| 314th       | VC-7        | 4         | 5.0                          | 4.8                          | 4.6                         | 5           | N/R         | N/R        | N/R             |
|             | UH-1        | 4         | 6.5                          | 6.5                          | 5.7                         | 5           | N/R         | N/R        | N/R             |
|             | U-17        | 2         | 2.0                          | 2.0                          | 1.9                         | 3           | N/R         | N/R        | N/R             |
| TOTALS      |             | 70        | 84.5                         | 80.9                         | 72.6                        | 92          |             |            |                 |

FIGURE 1

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The 314th Special Air Mission Squadron, activated in July 1969, was equipped with four VC-47s, four UH-1s, and two U-17s. But the squadron remained unorganized because of its politically sensitive tasks. According to one account, "no one at Wing level or in VNAF headquarters wanted to take responsibility for naming a commander and assigning the aircrews to a squadron which would work in such close contact with Vietnamese dignitaries."<sup>7/</sup>

Thus, in January 1970, the 33d Wing had one fully qualified gunship squadron and four squadrons that were less than fully qualified. Although this represented a significant expansion in the capability of the 33d Wing during Program I and Program II of the Improvement and Modernization (I&M) Program, plans for additional expansion were already approved and plans for even greater expansion were being considered as part of a proposed Program III.<sup>8/</sup>

As a fundamental part of the expansion planned for the VNAF, Air Divisions were to be established, thus adding a new level of management between VNAF Headquarters and operational units. In the 33d Wing, this reorganization required the evolution of a new command organization, the 5th Air Division, and a new VNAF flying wing, the 53d. The Tan Son Nhut Air Base Wing and the 5th Support and Maintenance Wing were also to be activated. The management skills within the 33d Wing would thereby be dispersed both laterally and vertically at a time when executive management was already attenuated by earlier expansion.<sup>9/</sup>

[REDACTED]

Nevertheless, this reorganization was an essential element of VNAF growth, and the immediate hardships it posed promised sound rewards in the long run.

The proposed further expansion of the VNAF under Program III was approved on 13 March 1970 by the United States Secretary of Defense.<sup>10/</sup> Indicative of the more comprehensive nature of this final stage in the growth of the VNAF, the term CRIMP (for Consolidated Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces Improvement and Modernization Program) was substituted for Program III and emphasis was shifted to the qualitative improvement of the Vietnamese military establishment as well as the quantitative growth of each individual service. The goal was self-sufficiency for the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF).

Self-sufficiency in this context implied that the armed forces of the Government of Vietnam (GVN) could maintain the level of security that had been won jointly by the United States and South Vietnam.\*

Self-sufficiency for the VNAF as directed by CRIMP hinged on a viable and assertive training program. In the 5th Air Division, training was a massive challenge. The expansion from a Wing to an Air Division not only required the training of 1,095 new personnel, but the retraining of many already assigned. The addition of C-123s, AC-119s, and C-7s as part of CRIMP required new maintenance skills as well as aircrew training--both of which had to begin before the aircraft could be delivered.

\*For a discussion of "self-sufficiency", see The Vietnamization of The Air War, 1970-1971.

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### The Challenge

CRIMP required the 5th Air Division to expand from 80 aircraft in January 1970 to 228 by December 1972. This growth, according to the Chief of Air Force Advisory Team 5 (AFAT-5), required ". . . an unprecedented upgrade program. . . ." <sup>11/</sup> For example, to activate the two C-7 squadrons in 1972, 149 pilots had to be trained between August 1971 and October 1972. Of these, 43 were experienced C-47 pilots training in the United States. <sup>12/</sup> In addition to the 43 pilots provided to the C-7 squadrons, the 415th (C-47) Squadron provided 48 pilots for the C-123 squadrons, and 24 for transition into EC-47s. Concurrently, the 415th Squadron ". . . provided a significant share of the VNAF productive airlift . . . ." <sup>13/</sup> This was not an easy task.

Maintenance, like operations, faced a substantial challenge during the course of this expansion. In practical terms, the activation of the 5th Air Division meant the mechanics of January 1970 often had to become the supervisors in 1971. Both they and their replacements had to be trained. Not only were more maintenance men required, but also a more sophisticated level of maintenance training was demanded. The C-123, for example, represented ". . . an extremely large jump . . ." <sup>14/</sup> in VNAF capability.

In support areas, the new 5th Air Division had to develop many necessary skills--often from scratch. As a result, civil engineering, communications, supply, and base transportation required particular attention. "The best people the VNAF have," said one advisor in 1971,

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"are in operations--and operations is a strong area because of it--so is maintenance. Housekeeping training started late . . . ." <sup>15/</sup>

### The Response

Since the goal of CRIMP was self-sufficiency, VNAF personnel were trained by VNAF instructors when possible. In the 5th Air Division, lack of qualified VNAF instructors in support skills was a handicap, but management of the training program was in capable hands. AFAT-5 advisors for both ground and flying training characterized their VNAF counterparts as highly capable and resourceful officers. <sup>16/</sup>

Although the managers were men of ability, the on-the-job-training (OJT) management system employed by the VNAF to monitor training was less satisfactory. Personnel records were often not current, and skill levels, even in current records, seldom reflected actual abilities. This resulted from the VNAF policy of adding as much as five years to a man's active duty service commitment when he advanced to a higher skill level. Under the existing system in 1971, there was doubt that the VNAF would ever have ". . . a hard measure of the skill level of their people," but their OJT program was effective. <sup>17/</sup>

While it was difficult to measure VNAF skill levels administratively, operationally VNAF skills were more visible. The challenge posed by aircrew expansion was described earlier in this chapter. To replace experienced pilots lost to newly formed squadrons, the C-47 and C-119 squadrons were compelled to upgrade new pilots as rapidly as possible.

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Upgrade efforts were limited by the flying experience of newly assigned pilots. By 1971, 5th Air Division was critically short of aircraft commanders. "The problem," wrote the Chief of AFAT-5, is not ". . . quantity but balance." It was a problem that could only be cured by time.<sup>18/</sup>

Expansion of the 5th Air Division also increased the requirement for VNAF navigators--a requirement that the ". . . USAF was unable to accommodate in CONUS training . . . ." <sup>19/</sup> Therefore, in 1970, Lt. Col. Sinh, DCS/Training for the VNAF 33d Wing established a basic navigator training course at Tan Son Nhut AB with assistance from AFAT-5. By July 1971, twenty-five navigators had been trained and 60 were to be training by the end of the year.<sup>20/</sup>

United States Air Force advice and assistance for the VNAF training program took several forms. On occasion, as with the navigator training course, advice was more necessary than assistance. In other cases, substantially more assistance was necessary.

A very significant project, the Integrated Training Program (ITP), was initiated in February 1970 and provided for the integration of large numbers of VNAF personnel into operational United States Air Force and Army units.<sup>21/</sup>

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The heaviest ITP student load for 5th Air Division was in base support. In air base defense, for example, the USAF graduated 137 VNAF personnel by October 1970. These graduates then established their own training program for the 5th Air Division. Overall, ITP was judged ". . . an excellent training program . . ." and one that contributed to VNAF self-sufficiency. One AFAT-5 advisor pointed to it as an example of ". . . setting up a realistic training program." ITP required active liaison assistance by AFAT-5 between the VNAF and the USAF units.<sup>22/</sup>

Training in the 5th Air Division was augmented by two Mobile Training Teams (MTTs) between September 1970 and August 1971. The first, a C-123 team, trained 367 VNAF maintenance personnel. After completing the training, most of the trainees entered an Integrated Training Program at either Tan Son Nhut AB or Phan Rang AB.<sup>23/</sup>

The second MTT, an AC-119 team, was located at Phan Rang AB. The job of this team was to train 5th Air Division personnel to maintain the systems on the C-119 that were unique to the gunship model. A total of 121 VNAF personnel were trained by this team, and following completion, they joined the 14th Special Operations Wing (USAF) at Phan Rang AB for ITP.<sup>24/</sup>

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In addition to maintenance training, crew training was conducted at Phan Rang AB for transition into both the C-123 and AC-119. In-country transition training was expected to save approximately \$800 thousand on these systems. But more importantly, valuable time was saved in reaching VNAF operational readiness with both aircraft.<sup>25/</sup>

Between January 1970 and July 1971, USAF advice and assistance to the 5th Air Division achieved significant results. Aircrew and maintenance training were both nearing completion for the C-123 and the C-119, and the first crews for the C-7 had entered training. Training in base support areas was progressing also. In describing the VNAF training growth one advisor wrote ". . . judging from how things were in September 1970, as opposed to how they are today, the DCS/T has come into its own. They have the initiative and aggressiveness to carry out the training functions of the 5th AD. At this point, liaison rather than advice is the primary function of the training advisor."<sup>26/</sup>

In one training area, however, there were conflicting views in 1971. "The number one weakness of the 5th AD flying operation," wrote the flying training advisor in August 1971, "is the lack of proficiency in instrument flying."<sup>27/</sup> This view was also expressed in an end of tour report in June 1971.<sup>28/</sup> However, the Air Force Advisory Group's position in January 1971 was that "transport aircraft are meeting their instrument and night requirements to maintain a night-all-weather capability . . . ,"<sup>29/</sup>

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and this position was reaffirmed in an Advisory Group briefing in August, 1971.<sup>30/</sup> One way to resolve these opposing views might be to re-examine the standards against which VNAF instrument proficiency was measured.

Although there was disagreement about the 5th Air Division's instrument proficiency, overall operational performance continued to improve as new squadrons were formed. In January 1970, the VNAF provided less than 30 percent of the airlift support of the RVNAF. By July 1971, the Advisory Group Director of Operations (DO) reported that the VNAF was airlifting 50 percent of the air cargo required by the RVNAF.<sup>31/</sup>

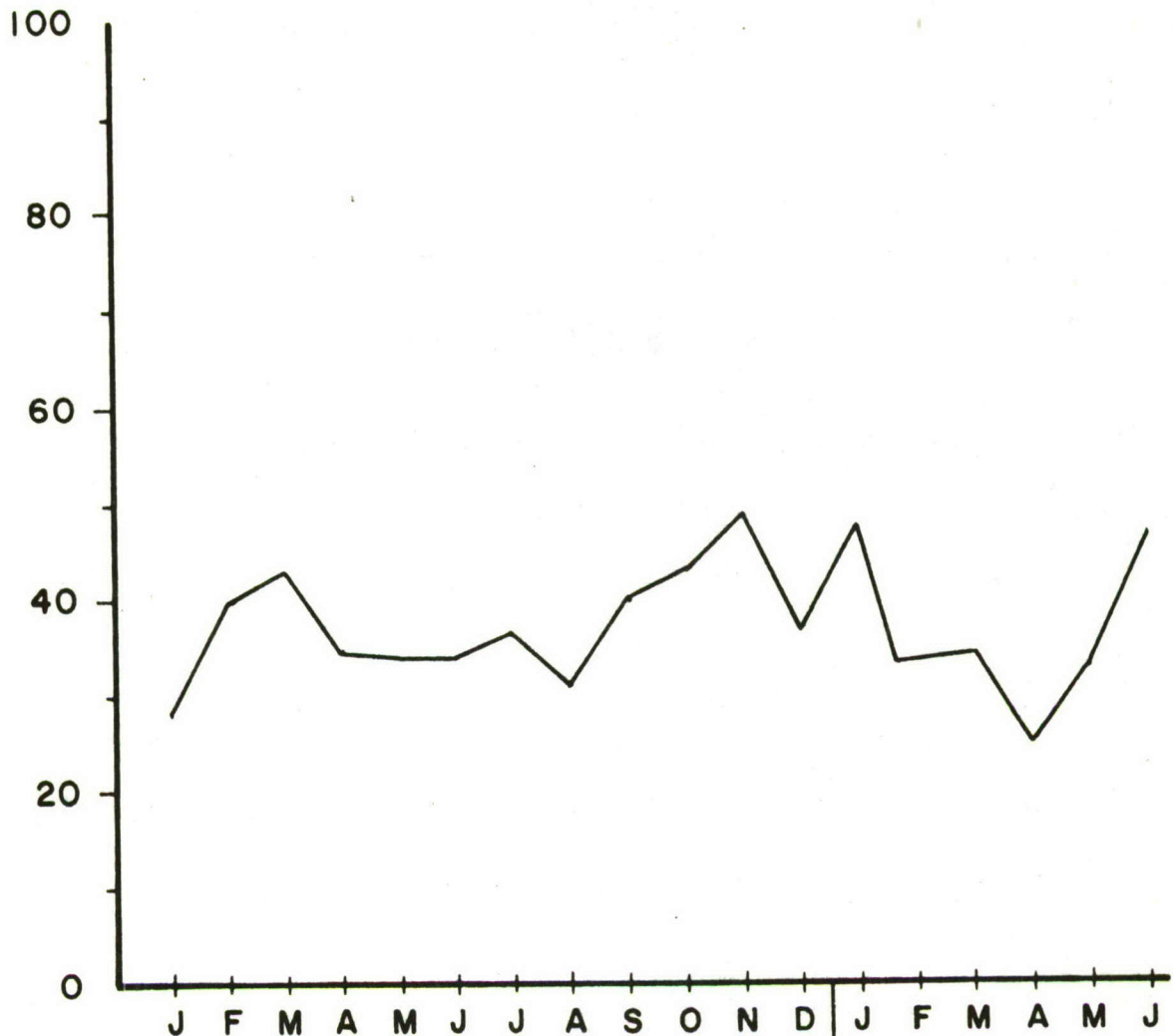
In November 1969, the VNAF initiated a Logistics Airlift System (LOGAIR) with daily flights to all of their major bases. The LOGAIR operation "dramatically" improved supply effectiveness by reducing NORS shipping time.<sup>32/</sup> It became a permanent part of the VNAF airlift system.

Perhaps the most telling event in VNAF airlift development during this period was Operation Eagle Jump. In December 1970, the 33d Wing began sustained airlift operations to support ARVN units from Kompong Cham airport, Cambodia. The first aircraft, a C-47, landed at 0900 on 14 December with the VNAF airport commander, his staff, and maintenance personnel. From that date until 29 December 1970, the airlift effort continued steadily despite a mortar attack on the airport on 21 December

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# AIRLIFT SUPPORT OF RVNAF (TRANSPORT)

% CARGO CARRIED BY VNAF



|                        | JAN  | FEB  | MAR  | APR  | MAY  | JUN  |
|------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| TOTAL TONS (VNAF/USAF) | 2666 | 2854 | 4350 | 2856 | 2517 | 2012 |
| TOTAL TONS (VNAF)      | 848  | 939  | 995  | 874  | 1190 | 1297 |
| CAMBODIA MAP (VNAF)    | 663  | 535  | 467  | 415  | 420  | 255  |
| CAMBODIA RVNAF         |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| SUPPORT (VNAF)         | 59   | 144  | 0    | 79   | 26   | 34   |
| % OF TOTAL TONS (VNAF) | 32   | 33   | 23   | 31   | 47   | 64   |

SOURCE: VNAF STATUS REVIEW (JULY 1971)

FIGURE 2

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and frequent light mortar fire thereafter.<sup>33/</sup> The operation was termed highly successful, although some difficulties were encountered.<sup>34/</sup>

"Throughout this operation, the . . . absence of a central one-point control function resulted in notable confusion."<sup>35/</sup> Planning for withdrawal was also inadequate. Eagle Jump was a test of VNAF combat airlift and one that revealed considerable capability as well as some problems.

Command and control difficulties revealed during Eagle Jump resulted partially from expansion, and during 1971 action was taken to acquire an airlift-dedicated communication system and to train a Combat Control Team.<sup>36/</sup> But expansion was not the sole cause of the difficulty. The wing commanders in the 5th Air Division ". . . although receptive to suggestions from the DCS/Ops, . . . established operations policies in their respective wings with pretty much a free hand."<sup>37/</sup> One advisor even wrote that the timetable of intersquadron transfers was given to him by the 33d Wing Commander ". . . in confidence because he did not want it to fall into the hands of VNAF HQ people."<sup>38/</sup> This spirit of independence resulted in inadequate staff coordination. In the opinion of several advisors, the Vietnamese resisted staff coordination because of cultural characteristics. They were reluctant to admit the need for assistance from another staff agency for fear their request would be taken as an admission of weakness and thus a "loss of face." Instead, they preferred to call on AFAT-5 advisors for "liaison." The advisors recognized this tendency as a threat to VNAF self-sufficiency and strongly resisted it.<sup>39/</sup>

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One indication of substantial progress in overcoming this weakness was evident in the 5th Air Division standardization and evaluation program. In July 1971, it was judged by one AFAT-5 advisor as ". . . the strongest stan/eval program in the VNAF . . . ." Some of the forms devised were even "exported" to other VNAF air divisions.<sup>40/</sup>

One serious limitation of airlift capability--and a restraint on VNAF expansion--was the lack of adequate 5th Air Division terminal facilities at Tan Son Nhut AB. The VNAF loading area was in front of the VNAF base operations building in an area so restricted that USAF C-130 taxi clearance margins ". . . all but precluded their loading and operation in that area."<sup>41/</sup> In June 1971, the AFAT-5 chief requested the MACV VIP flight operation facilities be transferred to the 5th Air Division. He reported that the current VNAF air terminal operation was ". . . located in an overcrowded, inaccessible and insecure area," and that operations there were ". . . unsafe . . . and only marginally feasible . . . ."<sup>42/</sup>

The shortage of facilities for 5th Air Division expansion had been anticipated. In an end-of-tour report in October the Chief of AFAT-5 wrote that "Maintenance and Supply facilities required for activation of the 5th Air Division are not programmed to be available when required. With the activation of the 5th Air Division, a decided lack of Maintenance facilities will impair the success of the I&M Program."<sup>43/</sup> He identified the ". . . most serious constraint . . . ." on the growth

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of the 5th Air Division as ". . . the absence of information on the phasedown of U.S. forces," and he expressed his opinion that ". . . inevitably . . . the U.S. must phaseout at Tan Son Nhut."<sup>44/</sup>

But there were compelling reasons to retard the U.S. withdrawal from Tan Son Nhut. The Headquarters for Seventh Air Force (7AF) was located there and MACV Headquarters was nearby. The base was the major U.S. aerial port for South Vietnam, and USAF C-130 in-country airlift was managed from Tan Son Nhut. A USAF reconnaissance wing was located there to provide timely intelligence to 7AF planners. Numerous other U.S. units located at Tan Son Nhut had equally valid reasons for remaining. As a result, the base was nearing saturation even before the 5th Air Division activated.

The activating units of 5th Air Division were at a serious disadvantage when competing with established USAF organizations for the limited space available. The transfer of facilities would necessarily degrade overall operational capability since the VNAF would require several months to bring units to an operational ready status.

The USAF and VNAF made serious efforts to solve the problem. The VNAF plan under which 5th Air Division was activated identified by building number and date those facilities which would be required and their intended use.<sup>45/</sup> The plan only applied to the VNAF however. The USAF did establish a schedule for transfer of assets, but the schedule was not followed because of operational requirements.

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The lack of maintenance space was judged ". . . the most critical" shortage in 1970, but space was limited in all functional areas from ramp parking to latrines.<sup>46/</sup> The VNAF attempted to alleviate the problem some by building a maintenance control center and rehabilitation existing buildings for use as an engine repair shop and a ground power equipment shop.<sup>47/</sup>

But there was a limit to what the VNAF civil engineers could build and there were limited sites remaining on which to build. There were 247 men assigned of the 357 men authorized the VNAF base civil engineers in June 1971. In addition, the materials for construction or rehabilitation--". . . paint, wall board, plywood, etc."--were frequently not available.<sup>48/</sup>

The Chief of AFAT-5 described the dilemma facing the VNAF and the USAF at Tan Son Nhut as being between a ". . . rock and a hard place."

"Our problem here in a nutshell," said one AFAT-5 advisor in mid-1971, "is that the USAF did not draw down as fast as the VNAF expanded and, consequently, we are behind."<sup>49/</sup> Until the 5th Air Division proved capable of performing the airlift mission, it was difficult for the USAF to withdraw many of its airlift resources at Tan Son Nhut. Until the USAF withdrew, it was almost impossible for the 5th Air Division to expand and become operationally ready.<sup>50/</sup>

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Conclusion

Despite the difficulties encountered in the transfer of facilities, dramatic progress had been made by the summer of 1971 towards the goal established by CRIMP--self-sufficiency for the South Vietnamese Air Force. The 5th Air Division was profiting from a successful training program and expanded capability. In both gunship and airlift operations, the Division was assuming more and more responsibility. Reconnaissance capability was not to be greatly increased until 1972 when an additional EC-47 squadron would be activated.<sup>51/</sup> Nevertheless, the transformation of the 33d Wing into the 5th Air Division and the significant increase in VNAF operational capability which that entailed was a substantial advance toward the Vietnamization of the air war.

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## FOOTNOTES

### CHAPTER FIVE

1. (U) CHECO Report, VNAF Improvement and Modernization Program (Hq PACAF, 5 February 1970). p. 84
2. (S) VNAF Staff Review (January 1970), p. 6-3.
3. (S) Ibid.
4. (U) VNAF Improvement and Modernization Program, p. 85.
5. (S) VNAF Status Review (June 1969)
6. (S) Ibid. (January 1970), p. G-3.
7. (S) VNAF Improvement and Modernization Program, p. 88.
8. (S) "End of Tour Report," Brig Gen Kendall S. Young, Chief, USAF Advisory Group, 15 February 1971, p. 3.
9. (C) Vietnamese Air Force Programming Plan 70-5, VNAF Hq., subject: Activation of 5th Air Division, p.3.
10. (S) Young, "End of Tour Report," p. 5.
11. (C/NF) "End of Tour Report," Colonel Semour Hunt, Chief, Air Force Advisory Team 5, 13 October 1970, p. 2.
12. (C) AFAT Chiefs' Conference Discussion Item, "Feasibility of Conducting C-7 Aircrew Training In-Country," 17 January 1971.
13. (C) "End of Tour Report," Colonel Edward H. Mosher, DO, Air Force Advisory Team 5, 12 June 1971, p. 4.
14. (U) Interview with Colonel Roy D. Broadway, Chief, AFAT-5, by Captain Drue L. DeBerry, Tan Son Nhut Air Base, 5 August 1971.
15. (U) Ibid; Hunt, "End of Tour Report," p. 3; and Interview with Major Ronald T. Lanman, DCS-T, AFAT-5, Tan Son Nhut Air Base, 3 August 1971.
16. (U) "End of Tour Report," Capt Raul Zamora, Ground Training Advisor, AFAT-5, 31 July 1971, p. 1.
17. (U) Broadway Interview; and Zamora "End of Tour Report," p.3.
18. (C) Ltr., AFAT-5 to AFGP-DO, subj: Rated Pilot Resources in 5th Air Division, 14 March 1971.

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19. (U) Young, "End of Tour Report," pp 20-21.
20. (U) "End of Tour Report," (draft), Major Ronald T. Landman, DCS-T, AFAT-5, 1 August 1971, pp. 6-7.
21. (C) AFGP Staff response, "Director of Plans and Programs End of Tour Report," 9 July 1971.
22. (U) Zamora, "End of Tour Report," p. 2.
23. (U) Ibid. p. 3.
24. (U) Ibid. p. 4.
25. (U) Young, "End of Tour Report," p. 9.
26. (U) Zamora, "End-of-Tour Report," p. 7.
27. (U) Landman draft, "End of Tour Report," p. 2.
28. (U) Mosher, "End of Tour Report," p. 4.
29. (U) AFAT Chiefs' Conference Discussion Item, January 1970.
30. (U) Briefing, AFGP-XR, 11 August 1971.
31. (C) "End of Tour Report," Colonel Franklin G. Davies, AFGP DO, 6 July 1971. p. 2.
32. (U) Young, "End of Tour Report" p. 16.
33. (S) Ltr., Operation Eagle Jump, AFGP-AFAT 5 to AFGP-CC, 30 December 1970.
34. (U) Mosher, "End of Tour Report," p. 3.
35. (S) Ltr., Operation Eagle Jump, p. 3.
36. (C) Davies, "End of Tour Report," p. 2.
37. (C) Mosher, "End of Tour Report," p. 5.
38. (C/NF) "End of Tour Report," Lt Col Robert A. Erickson, AFAT-5, Wg Co Advisor, p. 5.
39. (C/NF) Mosher, "End of Tour Report," p. 6.
40. (U) Erickson, "End of Tour Report," p. 1.
41. (U) Memo for the Record, subj: Aircraft Loading at VNAF Terminal, 4 May 1971, by Lt Col William B. Webb, AFAT-5 DCS/P&P Advisor.

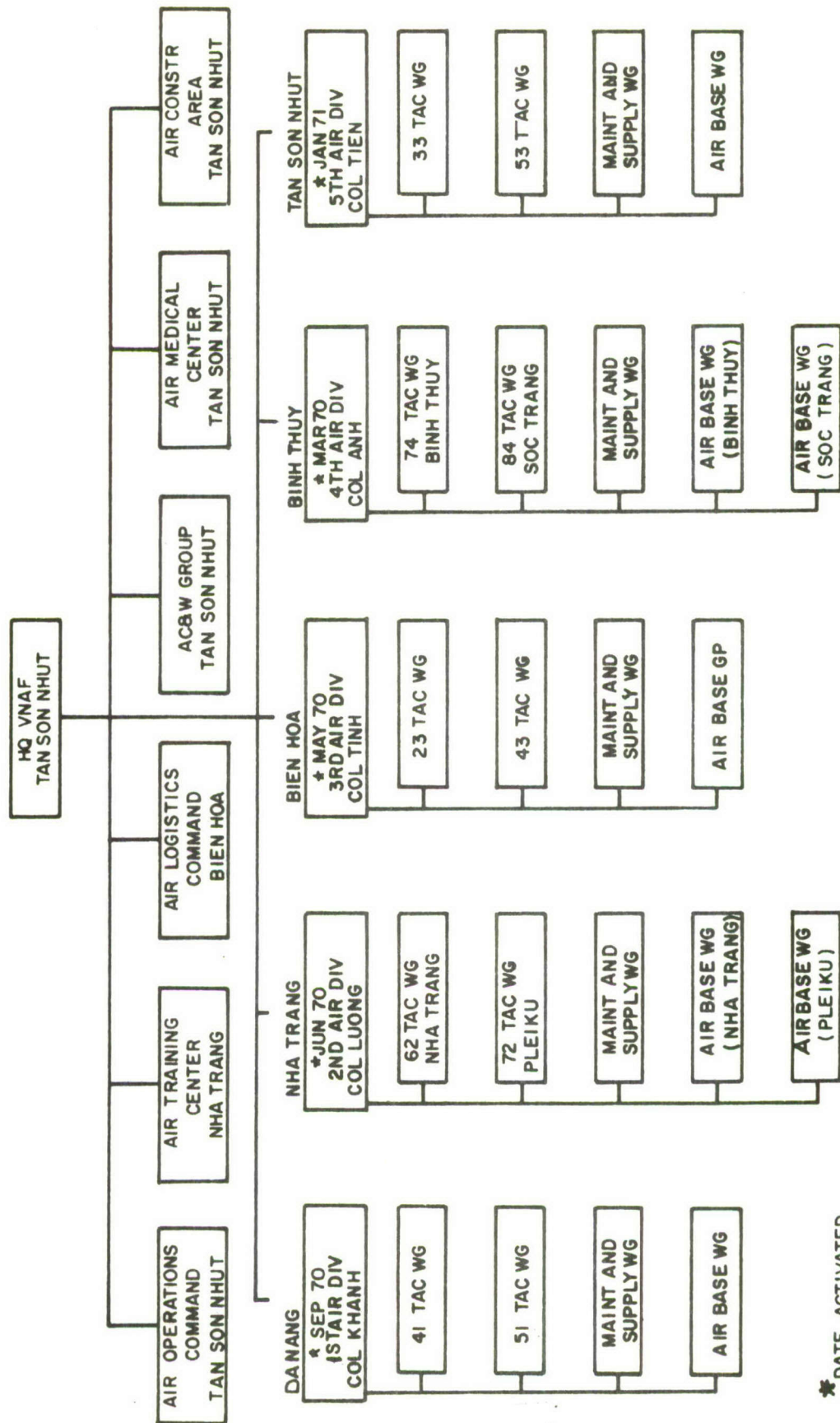
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42. (U) Ltr, 5th Air Division Air Terminal Requirements, from AFAT-5 to AFGP XR, 15 June 1971.
43. (U) Hunt, "End of Tour Report," p. 1-5.
44. (C/NF) Ibid., pp. 2-1, 2-3.
45. (S) VNAF Programming Plan 70-5, VNAF Hq.
46. (C/NF) Hunt, "End of Tour Report," p. 4.
47. (U) Interview with Lt Col Jimmie R. Osborne, DCS/Material Advisor, AFAT-5, Tan Son Nhut Air Base, 4 August 1971 by Captain Drue L. DeBerry.
48. (U) Erickson, "End of Tour Report," p. 4.
49. (U) Interview with Lt Col Onville D. Ingalsbe, DCS Plans Advisor AFAT-5, by Captain Drue L. DeBerry, Tan Son Nhut Air Base, 3 August 1971.
50. (U) Broadway Interview.
51. (S) VNAF Status Review (June 1971).

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# VNAF ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



\* DATE ACTIVATED

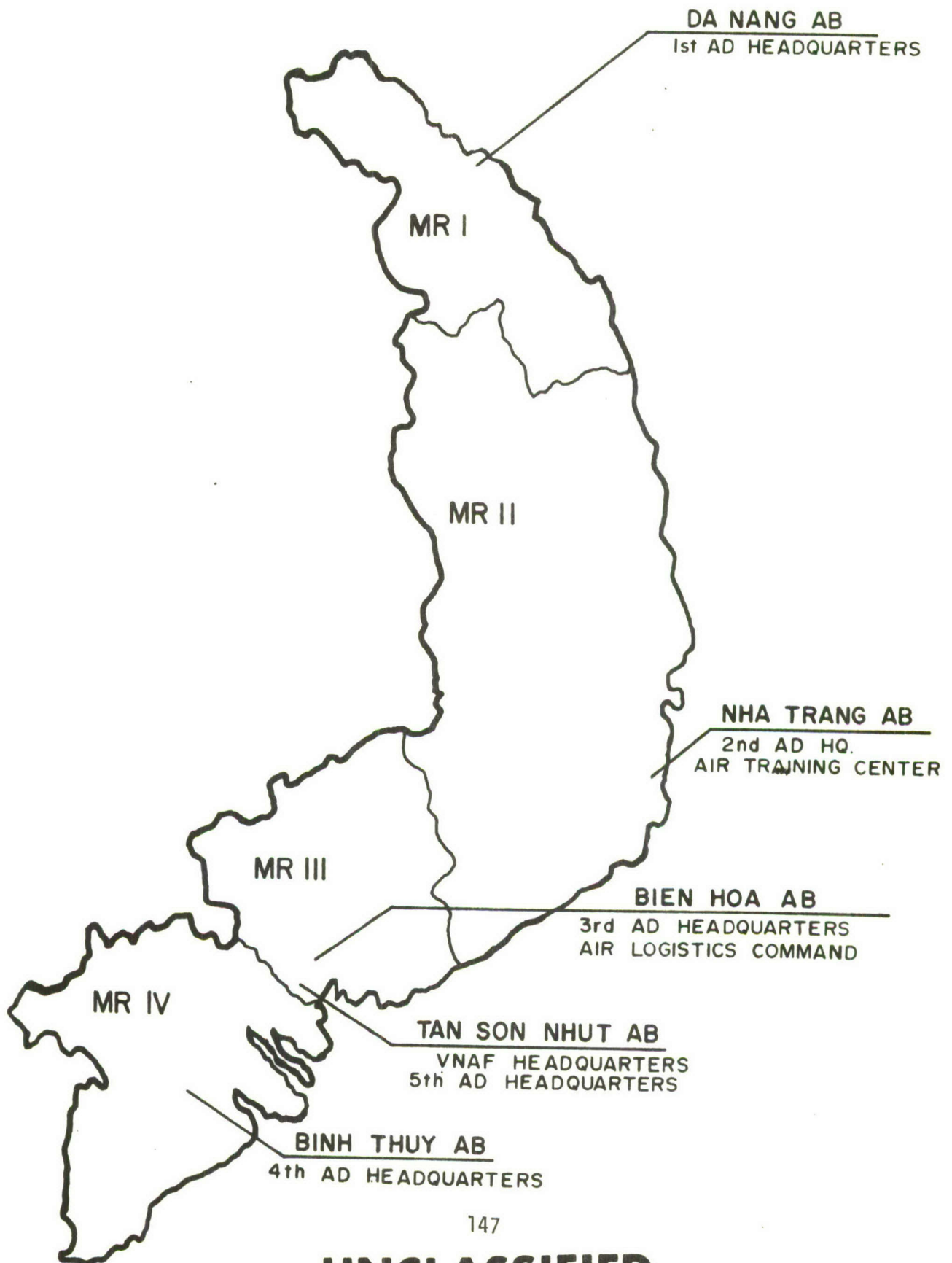
APPENDIX I

SOURCE: VNAF STATUS REVIEW (JUNE 1971)

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## APPENDIX II

### LOCATION OF THE VNAF AIR DIVISIONS



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## GLOSSARY

|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| AB        | Air Base  |
| ABW       | Air Base Wing   |
| AC&W      | Aircraft Control and Warning  |
| ACM       | Air Combat Maneuvers  |
| AD        | Air Division  |
| AFGP      | Air Force Advisory Group  |
| AFVN      | Armed Forces Vietnam Network  |
| AGE       | Aerospace Ground Equipment  |
| AHC       | Assault Helicopter Company  |
| ALC       | Air Logistics Command   |
| ALO       | Air Liaison Officer   |
| ARVN      | Army of the Republic of Vietnam   |
| ASHC      | Assault Support Helicopter Company  |
| C Ratings | A measure of unit combat capability determined by the number of operationally ready aircrews and aircraft available.  |
| C-1       | A high degree of relative effectiveness. The unit is adequately manned, equipped, trained and capable of performing its primary mission: At least 85 percent authorized aircraft possessed, at least 71 percent of authorized aircraft operationally ready, at least 80 percent of authorized crews formed, at least 75 percent of authorized crews operationally ready, and at least one operationally ready crew for each operationally ready aircraft. |
| C-2       | A lesser degree of capability than C-1. Minor deficiencies exist in personnel, facilities, equipment, training, etc.: 61 to 84 percent of authorized aircraft possessed, 51 to 70 percent of authorized aircraft operationally ready, 56 to 79 percent of authorized crews formed, 51 to 74 percent of authorized crews operationally ready, and at least one operationally ready crew for each operationally ready aircraft.                             |
| C-3       | A lesser degree of capability than C-2. Major deficiencies exist in personnel, facilities, equipment, training, etc.: 30 to 60 percent of authorized aircraft possessed, 25 to 50 percent of authorized aircraft operationally ready, 31 to 55 percent of authorized crews formed, 25 to 50 percent of authorized crews operationally ready, and at least one operationally ready crew for each operationally ready aircraft.                             |

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|        |   |
|--------|---|
| C-4    | A very low degree of effectiveness. Unit is incapable of performing its operational mission. Extreme deficiencies exist in personnel, facilities, equipment, training, etc. Aircraft and aircrew readiness percentages are lower than those prescribed for C-3. |
| CRIMP  | Consolidated Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces Improvement and Modernization Program   |
| CRP    | Control and Reporting Point   |
| DASC   | Direct Air Support Center   |
| DIFM   | Due in for Maintenance  |
| DMZ    | Demilitarized Zone  |
| DO     | Director of Operations  |
| EOD    | Explosive Ordnance Disposal   |
| FAC    | Forward Air Controller  |
| FOL    | Forward Operating Locations   |
| FSB    | Fire Support Base   |
| GCI    | Ground Controlled Intercept   |
| GVN    | Government of Vietnam   |
| HS     | Helicopter Squadron   |
| I&M    | Improvement and Modernization   |
| IPIS   | Instructor Pilot Instrument School  |
| ITP    | Integrated Training Program   |
| JEFM   | Jet Engine Field Maintenance  |
| JPA    | Job Performance Aid   |
| LOGAIR | Logistics Airlift System  |
| LS     | Liaison Squadron  |
| MR     | Military Region   |
| MTT    | Mobile Training Team  |
| NORM   | Not Operationally Ready/Maintenance   |
| NORS   | Not Operationally Ready/Supply  |
| NVA    | North Vietnamese Army   |
| OJT    | On-the-Job Training   |
| OR     | Operationally Ready   |

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|       |   |
|-------|---|
| PEC   | Photo Exploitation Center                   |
| PIMO  | Presentation of Information for Maintenance |
| POL   | Petroleum, Oil, and Lubricants              |
| RVNAF | Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces            |
| SLAR  | Side-looking Radar                          |
| SOW   | Special Operation Wing                      |
| TACP  | Tactical Air Control Party                  |
| TACS  | Tactical Air Control System                 |
| TASS  | Tactical Air Support Squadron               |
| TFS   | Tactical Fighter Squadron                   |
| TIC   | Troops in-contact                           |
| TO    | Technical Order                             |
| USAF  | United States Air Force                     |
| VC    | Viet Cong                                   |
| VNAF  | Vietnamese Air Force                        |